Secret-Mystery Shopper/Personal Assistant Scams

CIS is advising the CUNY community regarding so-called “Secret Shopper” and “Gift Card” scams. Please familiarize yourself with these scams.

Security Threat Identification / Symptoms
Email containing an offer of employment to be a “secret shopper” or “personal assistant.” Such unsolicited offers are scams. Sometimes the message is sent from a CUNY email address whose account has been compromised, or references a CUNY “job placement” office, to lend “legitimacy” to the email.

Recommended User Action
DO NOT reply to unexpected or unusual email from any sender

DO NOT reply to email with any personal information or passwords. If you have reason to believe that the request is real, call the institution or company directly

DO NOT click a link or open an attachment in an unsolicited email message. If you have reason to believe the request is real, type the web address for the company or institution directly into your web browser

DO NOT use the same password for your work account, bank, Facebook, etc. In the event you do fall victim to a phishing attempt, perpetrators attempt to use your compromised password to access many online services

DO change ALL your passwords if you suspect any account you have access to may be compromised

DO be particularly cautious when reading email on a mobile device. It may be easier to miss telltale signs of phishing attempts when reading email on a smaller screen

DO remember that official communications should not solicit personal information by email

DO complete the 40-minute information security awareness training located at security.cuny.edu

Updated: April 2020
Security Threat Explained
In these scams, which are often directed at students, an unsolicited secret shopper or personal assistant employment offer is sent by email, sometimes appearing as if sent by a fellow student.

When a victim responds, the scammer will typically arrange to send the victim a (fake) check and request that it be cashed or deposited immediately. The check amount is represented as both pay for work to be performed and expense money to accomplish requested services. The victim is then typically instructed to purchase gift cards and send back pictures of them with the PIN codes visible. The scammers use the codes to spend the value of the gift cards.

It can take the bank weeks to determine that the check is fake, and when that happens the victim is left responsible for any money advanced and suffers a financial loss from the previously purchased, and now worthless, gift cards.

The fact that legitimate secret shopper jobs exist bolsters the credibility of the scam. The offer email may also refer to a CUNY “job placement” office.

What is a Secret Shopper
Some marketing/merchandising companies legitimately hire “secret” or “mystery” shoppers as a quality assurance measure. Such shoppers anonymously purchase requested items in a store and then report on the experience. Typically, the shopper is reimbursed and sometimes the shopper keeps the purchase and/or receives a small payment. The vast majority of unsolicited secret shopper or personal assistant job offers, however, are scams.

For Further Information
https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0053-mystery-shop-scams

Secret Shopper Scam Recruitment Examples

Updated: April 2020
Lucrative potential earnings offer (fake) helps lure victims
MAKE OVER $300 WEEKLY

JOB BRIEF
There is a need for an urgent replacement for a Personal Assistant. We are looking for a friendly, simple & trustworthy personal assistant. You can take it as a part-time job depending on your choice. The hours will be between 2 to 3 hours daily, which can be increased if you want and this will give you free time to go on with your regular job or school activities. I give you 100% guarantees of their legitimacy.

JOB DUTIES
* Manage calendar, appointments, meetings, and reminders
* Process mail
* Data entry
* Receive calls/ at specific times
* Book appointments & Flight reservation

You will be working from home. The hours are flexible so you can spread the time to fit your schedule. You will be provided with sufficient funds and adequate instruction for every task. If you are interested in this opportunity send your name and contact phone number to Mrs. Laura at L77@NIGHT@GMAIL.COM for a kind consideration as the position assures a very attractive pay.