

Narrative: Heath Knott, Doorman, Top of the Stairs

Blacksburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Mallory Smith, Lauren Whaley

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I'm a member for the door staff at Top of the Stairs, and I've been there for about 14 months. I use to work at Personal Touch Catering over besides Owens and Hokie Grill, and one of the managers there is a bartender at TOTS. One of my friends that I've known since my freshman year at Tech was a door guy there and talked about how much money he was makin' during football season and during the week. And, um, I figured that sounded pretty good for me. So, I make minimum, \$7.25 an hour, plus 35 to 50 dollars extra a week.

A normal week I work 24-30 hours but during game day weekends, if there's a home game, we are really busy. Two weeks ago for Central Michigan I worked for 47 hours and this past week I worked for 48. So, Friday night I had to be there at 6:00 in the evening and I worked there till about 5:00 in the morning. Then I got to sleep for few hours before I had to be back there at 10:30 Saturday morning, and worked there all day and all night and didn't get out of there till about 5:00 AM Sunday morning.

Working in my line of work you have to have really thick skin. You have to take everything with a grain of salt, because if you take your work home with ya, you're gonna hate that job and you're gonna hate people within six months. It's just a job, ya know. One of the door guys gets really, really angry at people... [*laughs*] he's asked me a few times, when can we start hittin' people? [*Laughs*] If they hit you first, that's the only time, I remind him.

Typically in a night, we are the last stop on the train. So usually between 10:30 PM and midnight is when everyone comes down from Big Al's, Sharkey's, Hokie House, and all the other house parties and socials. So, we have lots of good and bad regulars that stop by, and game day weekends we see lots of good and bad fans as well.

[*Laughs*] Actually, the best night I had at work was last year during the Nebraska game. These guys who came from Nebraska were awesome. Believe it or not, the Nebraska fans are the best traveling fans we've had—that I've seen. They were all super nice and none of them got too out of control. We had a guy from Nebraska one night break up a fight between two Hokie fans by buying each of them a beer. I also remember this one couple from that weekend—they were older. I guess they had to be loaded because they were out there Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night. I started talking to them Thursday night and bought each one of them a shirt.

The rest of the weekend every time they saw me, they were nothin' but smiles. But it was a good weekend. That still sticks out in my mind, that Saturday night we played Nebraska.

That's the thing, you have to be a real people person. You can't be real introverted. You have to be able to talk to people whether you are in a good or bad mood. There's a little bit of integrity involved with it, too. Last Wednesday, I caught a guy with a fake. Yeah, so two guys came in first—they were older guys—they came in and were standing by the bar waiting to order a drink and this guy comes up and hands me an ID; it was actually one of the better fakes I've seen, but I knew it wasn't him. I asked him for a second form, looked at him and said, "sorry buddy" and wouldn't let him in. Then these two guys came over just laughing their asses off and they said, "this guy went to Wal-Mart to buy beer with this fake ID and the cashier at Wal-Mart told him you really changed since you've had your picture taken." But they thought it was hilarious. They said, "you must be really good at your job to spot that fake."

Ya know, you could turn a blind eye to things that go on in there and just say you never saw it. I mean, if someone is too drunk, they have to be kicked out 'cause ya just can't keep on walking by 'em. *[Laughs]* We had a guy work here last year; I was actually the one who said something about him getting hired. I told our boss Jason, listen, "I'm trying to be a good friend; he said if we needed to hire more guys to put his name in the mix. I'm not telling you to hire him, but I'm just telling you to talk to him, so that he knows he was in the mix." I mean you don't have to be a big guy to work at TOTS as a doorman, but it helps and he was about 5'5" maybe 135 pounds, tiny kid. Needless to say he got the job. He was good at throwing away trash and cleaning the bathrooms and that's 'bout it. He could not kick out a girl on her 21st birthday if his life depended on it. There was this tiny little girl who was really, really drunk one time, and we were like alright—we called him by his self-proclaimed nickname "Skinny." Uh so, I said, "Skinny, kick that girl out, it's her 21st birthday." I said, "you can handle this one." And he couldn't even do that. I mean he was a really great guy, but he just wasn't cut out for the job. And uh, it's kinda a required skill to kick someone out and have them come back the next night still liking ya. You have to be able to be nice to 'em, but still get the message across that they need to leave, and he couldn't get it. *[Laughs]* He just couldn't grasp that concept. He would just approach 'em and scream at 'em, and they were always so pissed off at the end of the night that they wouldn't come back.

A common misconception about my job is that you have to be a big guy, but you don't have to be a really tough guy; you just have to know how to handle situations. If I could be nice to everybody I would. But sometimes you can't be nice to people. Hell, that's how I've met some of my good regulars. I kick them out one time and they remember it, so now they come in well behaved.

I believe the amount I'm paid compensates for the work I do around TOTS. All I have to do is just come in there and walk around and make sure people get kicked out when they were supposed to. Then at the end of the night I clean up the trash and the bathrooms and sweep. On a typical night that I'm there for six hours, I'm really only doing the "work" for about two hours. The rest of the time I'm just walking around talking to people. I get paid really good to walk around and talk to people, but this is not what I want to do for the rest of my life; I want a career because to me this is just a job—not what I want to be doing for much longer.

I'd like to be back in Harrisonburg working for a commercial contractor building buildings wherever in Harrisonburg or around Harrisonburg. Hopefully I'd have a place of my own by now, either renting or owning, but this where I am right now isn't terrible; I still like what I'm doing so far. My rent's dirt cheap over at that house on campus; I'm paying 180 dollars rent. I guess if the cost of living was more expensive I probably would have moved by now. Eventually, I would like to be somewhere other than Blacksburg unless I could get a good job here.

Being adopted from South Korea, I think the American Dream is still alive and that people are still going after it. The American Dream has changed over the past few centuries because people nowadays are going to college instead of going into hard manual labor out of high school. My American Dream consists of having a good paying job. I want to build my own home and try to live comfortably. That is my dream I'd like to accomplish one day.

To read the complete conversation, please see the transcript.