

Sarah Grant
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Interview Reflection Paper
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I think that my interview was very successful, primarily because of the openness of my interviewee. She was even quite candid about the corporate culture of her workplace and in her evaluation of her managers. I was pleased that my interview was multi-dimensional. Jessica was quick to bring up both the positive and negative aspects of her job. She didn't complain about the challenges associated with balancing multiple roles as a mother, student, and worker, nor did she downplay the role of her work ethic in maintaining a comfortable lifestyle. I believe that I was given a pretty accurate and unbiased impression of both her job and her life.

Through my interview, I learned that my subject finds serving to be somewhat boring and monotonous. Jessica described her job as, "seating, serving, goodbye, seating, serving, goodbye." This was surprising to me because when she served my table she was very friendly and upbeat. She told me that much of serving is acting.

The predictability of her job was made clear when she described the two types of customers, those who welcome interaction and those who prefer a "silent server." Throughout the interview, comments that Jessica made demonstrated that she has a somewhat scientific view of serving. The way that she interacts with customers is based on accumulated experiences and she uses patterns when serving to ensure efficiency and maximize her tips.

I was surprised by the amount of money that Jessica makes as a server. While not disclosing any numbers, she told me that she is satisfied with her pay. Working 25-30 hours a week, she is able to support herself and her child, without using daycare. She has

her own car and apartment and is using student loans to pay for school. She told me that she receives no government assistance and I was given the impression that she is self-sufficient. I didn't ask Jessica if her daughter's father contributes to her expenses or if her parents help out, but I would be interested to find out what, if any, financial support she has.

Jessica confirmed my prediction when she told me that serving is an exhausting job. She described it as "hard physical labor" and told me that the worst aspect of her job is the pain that she feels after her shifts. Jessica said that there are really no benefits associated with her job. She has worked for over two years and been promoted, but has never had a raise from the \$2.13 she makes an hour from the company. She does not receive free meals, but rather 50% off. Despite the fact that she regularly works double shifts, breaks are never guaranteed. Often, she must eat while working.

When researching employer labor laws, I was amazed to discover that neither Virginia nor federal law mandates that employers give any breaks or meal periods to employees over the age of 15. In fact, only 23 American states have laws requiring employee breaks. Under federal law, if employers voluntarily give breaks, employees must be paid for short breaks that last less than 20 minutes. Employees are not required to be paid during meal breaks that last at least 30 minutes.

I think that a federal law should be past to grant a 30-minute unpaid break to all employees for each five hours that they work. Employers should be allowed to give the break at a time that is convenient for them, as long as it occurs no later than five hours into a shift. Employees should be given the options to sit and eat, if they choose.

There are some jobs that are not very conducive to breaks, such as restaurant work. For a server, it is especially difficult to make time for a break when customers are arriving and leaving at different times. It is for this reason that breaks should be optional. If servers prefer not to take a break, they should be allowed to eat a meal while working. They should get paid for any time spent eating.

This project made me redefine the term “busy.” Before my interview, I considered myself a pretty busy person; my days seem to fill up with classes, studying, and internship work. In general, I am pretty proud of how I am able to manage my time. However, once Jessica started to describe her schedule, I started to feel like a bit of a slacker. I quit my job for the semester in order to give myself more time for school and my internship, so hearing about how she juggles classes, being a mother, and a 30-hour workweek, I lost a little bit of pride for my multitasking abilities.

The interview reaffirmed my beliefs regarding upward class mobility and personal responsibility. While some might say that Jessica’s success is due to her luck finding a well-paying, flexible job and the good fortune that her daughter’s father shares parenting responsibilities, I give most of the credit to Jessica’s initiative. Jessica didn’t think she would be hired at Olive Garden, but she applied anyway. The flexibility in her schedule is due to her promotion to service trainer, which is most likely a result of her work ethic. She has clearly spent a lot of time sorting out her schedule so that she is able to maximize her productivity and be an attentive parent.

Despite circumstances that could have held her back, Jessica seems to be experiencing upward class mobility. From what I’ve gathered, she will be the first person in her family to go to graduate school. I think it would be insulting to say that her

accomplishments are the result of luck. It is clear to me that Jessica is a driven and hardworking person.

The interview confirmed my belief that people seem to be becoming disillusioned with the American dream. Jessica told me: "I used to be a dreamer. Back in those days, my dreams would change often ... I'm done picking occupations because of what I like. I just want to make a lot of money." In general, it seems that more people are taking a realistic approach to their education and occupation. Instead of searching for a "dream job," people are more focused on obtaining job security and a healthy paycheck. There seems to be more of an emphasis on the comfortable lifestyle part of the American dream than the exciting and fulfilling career aspect.

References:

"Frequently Asked Questions: Labor and Employment Law." Virginia Department of Labor and Industry. http://www.doli.virginia.gov/laborlaw/laborlaw_faqs.html (accessed April 6, 2010).

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