

My First Job Experience is a Life Experience I'll Never Forget



Matthew J. Lemay

I was 20 years old when I got my first job. It was a three-month work placement at a burger restaurant, and it was a life experience I'll never forget. I had years of previous volunteer experience and having successfully completed a pre-employment training program, I was confident that I was ready to take the next step and enter the working world.

After several weeks of searching, and with the help of an employment consultant, I managed to secure an interview at the place where I would eventually be hired.

Arriving at the restaurant for my initial interview, I was a bundle of nervous excitement. I swung open the doors to the restaurant for the first time and I distinctly remember how industrial, yet modern the place looked. I was dressed to the nines and nervous as hell, but I managed to make my way to the cash register and ask to speak to the man who would eventually become my boss.

The interview went well. I was very transparent about the fact that I was hearing impaired and had Asperger's Syndrome, and he was very accommodating. He told me that he wanted me to succeed, and that he would work with me to ensure that I would. I left that interview feeling on top of the world, and after a follow-up interview a few days later, I met with my employment consultant and got the news that I was hired.

I signed some paperwork and walked out of the meeting feeling euphoric. All the strides I had been making towards becoming employed had finally paid off. I celebrated by making a pit stop at my local music store and buying a few CD's before going home, where I anxiously waited for my first day of work.

That day would come on June 24, 2017. I arrived at the restaurant at 9:00 AM, as instructed by my boss. After going through the employee handbook, talking some more with my boss and officially signing my contract, I was issued a uniform (hat, shirt and apron) and told to change in the staff bathroom.

When I looked at my reflection in the mirror, it was then that I really realized that I was employed. I took a deep breath and returned to the front of the restaurant to commence my training.

My first experience with the lunch rush was slightly overwhelming, to the point

where my boss asked me no less than 12 times if I was okay, but otherwise, I consider that first day to be the absolute highlight of my employment experience. I ended up working a six-hour shift, and ended the day having received praise from my boss that left me beaming from ear to ear in pride.

Unfortunately, my story has a less-idyllic ending than the account of my first day would indicate.

I was contracted to work a minimum of 8 hours a week, and yet I would never again approach even 6 hours a week. At one point, I went an entire month without a scheduled shift or any contact from my boss.

It was at this point that my morale was at its lowest point. I got my employment consultant involved and set a meeting with my boss. At this meeting, we talked about my performance and I was given free reign to speak honestly about my experience thus far. I expressed my concerns, and frustration. When asked if I was enjoying the job, I returned that question with one of my own:

“Do I still have a job to enjoy?”

My boss was visibly taken aback by the question, but it was one that I felt I had the right to ask. He answered in the affirmative and assured me that the lack of shifts and contact was not at all connected to my performance. We came to an understanding that I would have a more clearly defined role going forward and my boss promised to handle all of my further training personally.

I walked out of the restaurant after that meeting, and I felt lighter than I had during the entirety of the preceding month. I returned to work soon after and I finished out the remainder of my contract.

My first employment experience may not have gone as smoothly as I had envisioned that it would, but it was definitely a life experience I'll never forget. I worked hard; I met great people, and I proved to myself that I could do anything I set my mind to, regardless of what anyone else says.

Now, at the end of it all, I can proudly look back on this first experience as a stepping-stone for the future. I have so much to offer the world, and I know that the best is yet to come.

For anyone who is on the Spectrum and looking for a job, I hope that reading my experience helps you in some way. I've been where you are, and I know that it isn't easy. But I also know that we are hard working, uniquely skilled and resilient, and I firmly believe that whenever one door closes, another one always opens. You may not find a perfect fit immediately, but eventually, you'll get your foot in the door and when you do... there will be no limit to what you can achieve.

Matthew J. Lemay is a writer who was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when he was 17. He's been writing for over 6 years and is currently working on several writing projects, including his debut novel. He has been very closely affiliated with Integrated Autism Consulting since receiving his diagnosis.

When he isn't writing, Matthew enjoys swimming, biking, taking walks, listening to music, watching films and television series, learning languages and spending time with his family.

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