

The following is a working journal by Courtney Eng. I have formed these opinions based on first hand experience and my interaction with other teen workers.

A Working Journal

Dear WJ:

I'm so proud to have finally gotten a job! I can finally relieve myself of the burden of expenses and constant stress from my parents. With this new job, I feel a greater sense of independence, maturity and responsibility. I'm now an official Sales Associate at the Gap, a position I've only dreamt of achieving. While it seems like a dream, it was fully deserved on my part. I must have called and checked in so many times, hounding for some acknowledgement of my application. I'd left an application at every Gap in my area, and called each one to confirm. I suppose if I hadn't gotten the job, it would have been a good experience for me, except good experiences do absolutely nothing on a resume and good experiences can't write references. Anyway, that's why I'm so happy to have this job.

Dear WJ:

Now that I'm a part of the workforce, I can really understand how work can be such a negative experience for teenagers. I think the biggest way that an employer can take advantage of an adolescence worker is to make them feel like the employee owes something to the employer and should be utterly grateful to have the job. I feel that employees should like their job and appreciate the fact that they have a job and have an income but there is a certain point where too much is too much. Employers use many techniques, whether implicit or explicit to make employees feel very far below them. This works at a disadvantage to both sides. When people have an antagonistic relationship with their superiors, they cannot be very productive. However, when a relationship is positive and equal, both sides have extra incentive to work hard to keep up with the other. I've come to realizing this after having some success in my work. I've been improving in customer service and increasing my base of product knowledge. This could have only happened had I felt a desire to improve for the betterment of my environment and that is due largely to my managers. Having a good manager who makes me feel like I'm a good contributor to the success of the store just makes me want to try all the more harder. If nothing else, a compliment propels me to be more and do more. So since a positive relationship with superiors fuels good work ethics and improving work skills, the opposite is true: that antagonizing and overly critical relationships in the work place will only lead to further failure and hostility. That is to say that when something needs to get done there are always at least two ways of approaching it; firstly, "hurry up and just do it" approach or secondly, "you're doing a great job, but as you know the store is really busy so we're going to need you to work as fast and efficiently as possible" approach. While the second option takes more time, care and consideration, it does wonders for worker productivity. Therefore, the

conclusion is that teens are often pressured into doing sloppy jobs by employers who don't care enough about them to help them strive towards being effective workers. I'm lucky that I've never had such a negative experience, but being a worker, I can still see the potential dangers.

Dear WJ:

I'm really lucky that I've had some work training before my job, otherwise I'd be totally lost. It could also be my natural ability to get along with others, but I think that forcing myself to volunteer with local summer camps was also an opportunity for me. However, one thing that bothers me is that I tried really hard to get into another volunteer opportunity, with the government, but they just wouldn't hire me. It was a real let down too, I mean they didn't even let me know that I was rejected, they just left me hanging so to speak. If my dad hadn't forced me to explore my options and apply everywhere under the sun, I would have no experience and probably no job. There should be some kind of help-line for students searching for jobs. Not to look up jobs for students but to answer questions relating to jobs. There are plenty of articles and newspaper interviews that hint at the correct ways to apply and various success stories, but when it comes down to it, all any one wants is someone to talk to. I'm again, very lucky, because my dad guided me through my application process, but for many of my friends, they are constantly asking me questions that I really have no answers to. People assume that if you have a job, you must have some kind of hidden talent or are aware of some formula. Well, that's not really true but there are definite ways of ensuring a better chance at a job. One thing that I learned first hand was to be persistent. I must have been extremely annoying when I called six million times to hound and hound about more job information but it worked, and I'm employed. And other information like how to do resumes and how to dress for interviews are all key pieces of information that students or young teen potential workers just don't know. It was surprising to me and you'd think it all was common sense, but really no. With the confusing world of job-hunting, teens need someone to hold their hand just to get them started. It's like jumping in to Advanced Calculus half way through the year and expecting to pass, except passing is getting a job and failing is the loss of opportunities, no income and no future reference for other potential jobs. Overall, teens need help with the basic info, and they need to know how to execute the behaviors to put them closer to jobs.

Dear WJ:

I think employers should offer their teen employees scholarships based on grades. Working and maintain good grades has perhaps been a greater challenge for me than any other. When I was younger I was always dancing, every single weekday and Saturdays, amounting up to 20 hours a week, and doing this I still managed pretty good grades. However, in grade 12 it's a different story, with increasingly greater homework

loads and work hours to balance, it's been very crazy. Working for 4 hours isn't just working 4 hours either. It's the half hour drive there and the half hour drive home, it's the 15 minutes getting ready and then the half hour or so to finally wind down from work. That amounts to almost two extra hours in addition to the 4 scheduled hours. And in the space of an evening when I have math homework and a poetry exam, it's completely ridiculous to expect anyone to finish all the work to or study effectively for the exam. Therefore, the end result is not studying for the exam, and the student who does nothing but go home to study, have dinner, and study again gets an A plus and leaves me to get a mere B. And of course, who will get the scholarship? The student with the A plus and no life. Well, I pride myself on having a life and diversified skills, but has that gotten me any recognition...no. I'm not totally embittered by my work experience, it's just that it's very frustrating sometimes the way students are compared and judged. When the criteria asks for volunteer work, I don't have enough hours because I needed the time for my dancing and school work, then when the criteria call for marks, I'm left in the dust yet again because of my dance commitment and my volunteer work at school. I put in a lot of time to my Graduation Council, in fact I am the secretary so I have to spend an extra hour typing minutes every week, and as time's gone by I can bang them out pretty quick and I'm proud of that. But then there are the crafty sorts of volunteers who socialize and move slow as molasses while they work and end up claiming 2 hours for making a simple poster. It's really outrageous, but is that slow worker given more recognition than the fast working who is more skilled an efficient? Well of course. Everything seems geared towards the tricky, dishonest types and seems to just bite the honest people in the butt.

Dear WJ:

Poor work conditions for youth. I personally don't really know what that's like. I mean there's a lunchroom for me to eat in and the back room is pretty well kept. But when I think about general work conditions, there are a vast many teens out there who work in dumps or who know where. I think that employers allow this because there is no incentive. Poor conditions, no sanitation and the rest of it are all products of low costs. Maybe it's the economist in me, but if employers were given an incentive of some kind of tax benefit or some kind of bonus, they would work harder to maintain their facilities. Then comes the question of how to gauge what is good and what is not. Well, the only response is to have annual check up of local businesses before they are eligible for the bonus. Companies simply register by making an appointment, and on the designated date the government checks out the facilities. Furthermore, this creates new jobs for people.

To prevent and control hazards on the job, employers should be forced to have safety training sessions every six months. These training sessions should include how to evacuate in the event of a fire, what to do in an earthquake, how to use ladders instead of chairs, how to lift heavy objects and how to encourage co-workers to work safely as well. Overall, it's the awareness that workers lack. Making helpful tips for lifting heavy objects or transporting goods more accessible as well as providing the tools workers need could prevent many more accidents. It seems that accidents occur in efforts to take a short cut or in efforts to work faster, but it the long-term cost of such speed just isn't worth it. We all seem to be caught up in a backwards world. In my industry we want to work fast to please the customer, but would it really do anyone any good if I busted my ankle climbing a shelf looking for a size medium? No, the company would have to look for a replacement; it'd take more time of the employer to get me the hospital than the few seconds I could have taken to find a ladder. I'm not saying that I rush carelessly because my managers work me like a dog, but I am saying that having only two ladders hidden in the obscurest places make it really temping to rush and use a chair to reach something. And for me, someone who always tries to please others, I really want to get the job done and the first thing to risk is safety.

Dear WJ:

Minimum wage. It's wonderful at times. I mean I get above minimum wage so that's super fantastic, but for a first time worker at McDonald's who trying hard to rake in the hours at six dollars an hour, I really have to sympathize with her. I love getting my paycheck, but for all the work I do, getting just under or over two hundred dollars is not much. I wish it was more, but I'm dead tired every weekend. So for me, I'm happy to get my wage, and that's just because I have a good employer. As for the other provinces where adults get more than youth, that's just another form of age discrimination. Ageism is totally disgusting. For every undeserving youth out there, there are at least 5 deserving youth. Wages should be based on skill and improvement. If someone works in a place where they get minimum wage, they, along with all first timers, should get the same wage and be given equal opportunities to get a raise. This supports the importance of skill development and improvement and makes all workers equal. People cannot assume that 17-year-old Jimmy spends all his money on video games and that 32-year-old Karen is providing for her five children. It could be that Jimmy is working to feed his family and that Karen is working so she can get a discount on clothing for herself and her friends. Since the later is impossible to determine, wages should be based on skill. Since Jimmy needs the money he will have incentive to work hard to get the promotion to pay for food and since Karen is solely motivated by clothing, she probably won't care too much about working better for more hours as long as she gets her discount. Therefore, while age usually dictates a great difference in responsibility, it is not always reliable, so people should get equal wages for equal work.

Dear WJ:

To conclude this working journal, I think work is great for youth. Work encourages responsibility, hard work, and determination. However, there are many ways that the system can be improved, and it is finding and implementing these ways that is the challenge. But what is life without a challenge? So we must work together, aspiring to improving and equalizing work conditions for all.
