

# Working for the 'Man': 'Getting a Job' in America

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*Spanning some 60 years of employment, this writer has some conclusions. Of course, these are from my own personal experiences. Yet, having spoken with a myriad of working stiffs over the years, perhaps this analysis is valid.*

During those 60 years of work, I think only *twice*, for a mere two weeks and then 5 months, did I work for a large corporation. Factoring that out, all the hundreds of bosses I have had were small businesspeople.

I can say almost *categorically*, with maybe an exception or two, the overwhelming majority of my bosses had but one agenda when it came to their employees: Make as much as you can and pay them the least you can (including any benefits). In all the instances, including the two corporate jobs, I worked for NON UNION businesses, with one of them having only union delivery drivers. Let's go there first.

In the winter of '74, engaged to be married and ready for college graduation, I saw an ad in the Sunday Times for 'Management Trainee'. Please, *always* avoid any job that advertises any such sort of position. What it means is getting a job to do whatever *dirty work* the company wants done to inhibit their employees from having a more *secure* experience. In my case during that bitter cold January was being hired to work in a linen company's Brooklyn plant.

My manager actually came out and said to me on my first day on the job: "Ok kid, the way it works here is the *more* you save money for the company, the *more* you can earn."

He then went on to tell me how *everyone* working there (except of course the managers) was A) Lazy B) shiftless and C) a born liar. My *epiphany* came when he scheduled me to go out with one delivery driver per day for one week. I was to 'Observe and learn' how the company operated. On day One of my routine I got into the truck with driver 1 and rode 'shotgun'. He had the Bronx territory.

The delivery truck was so old it must have had arthritis! The heater didn't work well, and driver 1 sucked on cigarette after cigarette, with his window always open.... in 20 degree weather. Most of his stops were bakeries, eateries and grocery stores. I went inside with him...mostly to get out of the smoky, freezing truck! None of the businesses had the dirty towels and linens ready for him. We had to search 'here and there' to collect them.

In one food store we had to go down the dark stairway to the basement, and I could *sense* the rats hanging out to our right. The driver caught my drift and laughed. "All part of the job kid." On the way back to the plant I was told how shitty the job was, and how the union the drivers belonged to was a 'Sweetheart Union'. "They *own* our union officials, and God knows how much they pay off those bastards. All I know is that at each new contract we get sold

down the river.”

Day Two with driver 2 was a repeat performance. These guys were getting screwed by everyone! On top of that they had to show up, in the coldest winter, at 5 AM to the garage/warehouse, which was as damp and frigid as being outside. They had to stay there for an hour getting loaded up and then handed the paperwork for the day. I made the mistake of getting there at 5 AM myself. Well, I got through the week, and by the following Monday I wanted OUT! Early Tuesday morning I called in sick (maybe from that garage/warehouse?).

That Friday I called up to ask to have my paycheck mailed to me. No way I ever wanted to go near that shithole again! Well, a few days went by and no check. That Friday, my buddy Torch (recently back from Vietnam) gave me a ride to the place. I walked in and went to the main window. The bookkeeper said she did not have it. Why? I asked. She said the manager told her not to write one. She said he told her that I never gave notice, so.... My friend Torch seemed as pissed as I was. We rushed to the manager's office and entered. "Hey", the manager shouted, "Nobody asked you to come in here. Get out!" Torch, all five feet seven of him, reached over and grabbed the manager, who had him by five inches and 100 pounds. "Listen, you fat \*\*\*\*, you don't give my buddy his check I'm gonna kick your fat ass, and then do it again when I follow you home!" They had my check in five minutes.

I have had experiences with sales jobs working for small businesses. It seems that if you were good enough to earn high commissions, the solution became obvious. They just *adjusted* your commission rate... downward of course. Since this was non union,

AND always NON Contractual employment, they could do as they pleased. One place had me work there, *very successfully*, for 18 months, building up an account base (we all serviced our accounts for reorders, earning the same commissions). Then, just like that, they told me that 'Stephanie' will call your accounts for reorders, and you will get 1/4 of the commission rate. Take it or leave it was the credo. How about the added torture: With no contract or union protection, a business owner would somehow NOT pay you all your commissions. They would tell you that things were bad, so in essence they were using some of the money owed to you to keep the place going. These things all happened to me. Truth can be stranger than fiction.

About 15 years ago we had our office cleaning lady with a husband who was a craftsman at a local cabinet company. He told how the owner kept complaining to the four craftsmen that he could not afford any raises or bonuses that year. Yet, the guy purchased or leased *three* new BMWs for each of his children... who were on the payroll. This is why we need to establish a system of commerce where there are ONLY union shops. As a socialist, I would like there to be profit sharing at small businesses, and not some wacky noblesse oblige of pennies on the dollar.

No, small businesses should make their employees feel like partners a bit, and reward them as such. The Japanese, during the 1980s, actually had a better plan. Then, it was called the **15% rule**. The highest paid employee of a business (usually the owner or CEO) could only earn 15 times the pay of the lowest full time employee, in salary and bonuses combined. Do the math and see how much fairer that could be. Of course, over the years they may have modified this to be a **30 Times** rule. Example:

At a company like CVS Health Corp (owners of pharmacy stores) in 2018 CEO Larry Merlo

earned over \$7.5 million in salary and bonuses. Under the 30 times rule, let us say that CVS's lowest paid full timer earns \$ 15 an hour.  $30 \times \$15 = \$450$  an hour. The eight hour day brings his pay to \$ 3600 a day, or \$ 18k a week. Times that by 50 weeks and it translates into \$900k a year. A big stretch from his current compensation, yes?

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