

My Life as a Public Servant

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Every time I look in my tattered, yellowing, baby book, I am reminded of the fulfillment of my destiny. I was destined to be a teacher. One particular page hosts a series of questions including, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It is on this page, as a six-year-old child, I told my mother to write, "A teacher." She wrote my words neatly in the space provided, and ever since that moment it has been branded into my subconscious to fulfill that destiny. When neighborhood children would come over to play, I remember eagerly persuading them to play "School." Who do you think played the role of teacher in those games? Through the years as a student, I was utterly fascinated with the notion of filling in numbers and words in those little blanks in the lesson and grading books the teachers carried around. I would catch myself watching them as they performed that task and daydreaming about the day I would be in their powerful position. I wanted to be the one to sit at the big desk at the front of the room. Today, I have fulfilled that destiny. I am the one who is filling in all of those little blanks, although it doesn't seem as intriguing as it once was to me, and sitting at the big desk. Throughout all of these school-related experiences, there have been several jobs unrelated to school that have made a significant impact on my life and the completion of my professional goal. The first job that made such an impact was my role as a Subway "Sandwich Artist."

In November of my junior year in high school, I was hired by a family friend to work at the Subway Restaurant on the third floor of the Charleston Town Center Mall. During evenings and weekends, I would work at this restaurant doing various tasks. As part of the evening crew, I would make sandwich-meat packets, slice an unbelievable amount of vegetables, wash dishes, stock products, thaw and bake bread, all along with waiting on vast numbers of customers and cleaning up a large mess at the end of the night. I've always been a hard worker who is eager to please my superiors, so I performed each of these tasks (and any others I was asked to do) without hesitation or complaint and usually with a smile. Working in the fast food industry was definitely hard work. I worked alongside many adults who considered this to be a career, nowhere to go from there except maybe to another fast food restaurant. Working at that restaurant gave me some insight into what I wanted to do, not work there the rest of my life. I knew in the back of my mind what I really wanted to do with my life; this was just a learning experience to help me stay focused on the task ahead. I worked on and off as a sandwich artist through the rest of high school and the first year of college. A job I had in college that reminded me to stay on task towards a career in teaching was my stint as a gas station attendant.

I worked at SuperAmerica (known today as Speedway) through most of my latter college years. The job had its ups and downs like any job does. Some things I liked about the job were talking to the diverse people that came into the store and shouting on the microphone to signal a gas pump was ready to go. Once, a man was standing at pump number eight patiently waiting next to his car for me to turn it on. Over the microphone I shouted, "Pump number eight, the ole' snowman, is rrrrrready!" He laughed so hard and threw me a thumbs up to show his appreciation for my humor.

Needless to say, I became a legend of sorts, and people either loved when I did it for them or hated it. Once, a scary situation happened to me. After the championship game between Marshall and Youngstown, a man came to my register laying a candy bar on the counter. As I rang up his order, I asked him if there would be anything else. He said, "I'll take all of the money in your register, too." I looked at him with a puzzled look. He reiterated his demand by holding his hand in his pocket like he had a gun. Not knowing whether he really had a gun or not, I gave him about three hundred seventy dollars from my register. He walked out into the night never to be captured. The odd thing is he was in line with a whole slew of other people. It happened so calmly that the people behind him didn't even know what had just taken place. Another disadvantage to the job was that being the low man on the totem pole forced me to work most, if not all, holidays at SuperAmerica. Working at that gas station has helped me appreciate the time off I get with teaching. You work very hard when school is in, but the vacations are nice! A job I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy is telemarketing.

For six long months of my life, I worked as a telemarketer. The job paid fairly well at the time, almost eight dollars per hour. However, to call people at home after they've had a long day at work and are in the middle of dinner is not something you want to do on a daily basis. People were extremely rude and made terrible comments about my choice of employment. Granted, I was trying to sell them some type of useless medical insurance through their Sears credit card, but my theory was at least I was working. The day I left the only job I ever actually quit was horrible. I was calling on a campaign that involved trying to get former fraternity and sorority members to sign up for a credit card that had their Greek letters inscribed on it. The central problem with the campaign was that most of the people I was calling were eighty years old or older and could care less about their Greek past. I received over a hundred calls that evening. It seemed like every single one of them had some sort of profanity aimed at me personally or my job. I stood up, took off my headphones, and began sobbing. I told my immediate supervisor I could no longer work for the company. A few of the team leaders took me into a conference room and asked me if I wanted to call the 1-800 counseling line to talk to someone. My exact words to them were, "If I have to call a counseling help line to continue working here, this job is not for me."

All of these jobs played a considerable role in helping me stay focused on my professional goal. My first job at Subway brought me into the work field and taught me discipline. Working at SuperAmerica taught me how to multi-task and work well with the public. And although I extremely disliked telemarketing, it taught me patience and to treat others with respect. To this day, I treat telemarketers with some level of respect. When they call me, I either hang up immediately so they don't have to go through their speech, or play the role of a Spanish-speaking person who doesn't speak English. Thinking about where I've been helps me to appreciate where I am. I wouldn't have any other job.