Going Through a Pandemic as an Essential Worker

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            I will begin by expressing all my gratitude to every single essential worker out there who had no choice but to stay working for their communities and their families. Although I understand that we all as a nation are struggling to adapt to a new society, there are the few out there who have remained strong and courageous throughout each breaking news.

It’s hard to say when exactly I started to notice the big change in my city, because it felt like it happened overnight. That’s not the case though. It was months in the making, but no one was ready. Suddenly, the middle-class workers became the staff that kept our society afloat without chaos. I mean seriously what would’ve happened if every McDonalds employee, In-n-Out cook, Starbucks barista, or any other essential worker decided not to show up to work due to this pandemic? All of the sudden, we are the proud minimum wage workers who are considered essential.

Throughout this pandemic, I learned valuable skills and new things about myself as a person. I remember I was at work one day, and I was informed that we would terminate the use of reusable cups to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. I didn’t think much of it, but soon after when I returned to work later that week, I was surprised to see the lobby completely bare, with no chairs or tables. Slowly, the panic began, and we eventually closed the front completely, only accepting orders through our drive thru. I received a text message from my district manager and shortly after a call. He explained to me that the company, Starbucks, would pay my leave of absence if I felt uncomfortable working through the “circumstances.” They would pay off a total of thirty days if I chose that option. My last option was to stay working but receive an extra three dollars an hour.

See, I know what you’re thinking—choose the leave! When would I ever get an opportunity like this ever again? Literally getting paid to stay home—what could possibly be better than that?

Yeah, I wish it was that easy to think that way, but honestly, I had to think what would truly benefit me. Two weeks before the virus reached Maywood, my car broke down and finally decided to give up on me. Later that same month, my mom asked for help in making payments for my tuition because things were getting difficult with our budget. Keeping all these things in mind, I chose to continue working. But most importantly I decided to keep on working because as long as my family worked, I would too.

I suffer from asthma, so I was very afraid at first. I knew if I got sick I would not make it because my lungs are very weak due to smoking cigarettes (yes, I know its gross, but I leave my bad habits story for another time). Even though I am considered to be at a high risk, I literally had no option. I couldn’t have the option to feel fear, because every single one of my family members in as essential worker.

I live in a duplex in the city of Bell, currently at one hundred and seventy-seven cases. I share my home with my aunt and cousins who live next door. I also share my home with my grandma, aunt, and uncle who live in the back house. Yes, every single one except for my grandma and cousin Abby, are considered essential workers. My two aunts and mother work at a grocery store along with my uncle and father who also work at a store. My cousin is a security guard in L.A and I am a barista at Starbucks in the city of Maywood. So honestly, why would I choose to live every surviving day in fear. I have a really high risk of not making if I get sick with this new virus, but I will continue to live each day as if it were my last because who knows when that can be? I’m not afraid or sad. It just helped me become a better worker, daughter, sister, and loved one.

            We can take whatever we want from a situation and create it our own. So, I decided to take this horrible situation and make it into something that will change me as a person for the better. Maybe someday we will realize that indeed we are the virus set on Earth to destroy. Maybe this is karma, so why will I argue with that?

Don’t get me wrong, it hasn’t been all sunshine’s and rainbows for me. The day I lost my uncle had to been one of the hardest obstacles I have endured so far. It really tested my faith in this universe, and I wondered if in the end it was worth waking up and not being able to hear his voice. This man taught me the importance of family, nothing thicker than blood with love and respect. He was the reason I got the letter P tattooed on my ring finger. I will forever be grateful that I made that decision because now I can look down my hand and see him. I lost my uncle in a car crash, not to COVID, so it made me realize that any waking moment may be your last. Even in the comfort of your home, life is meant to be lived with passion, not fear, because then when it is over, you lived it to the fullest. I think the hardest part for me was not being able to see him put in the earth, but now I have something to look forward to once this all over. I received the phone call of his death at work, but due to the short amount of people, I could not leave until my shift was over and had to return back to work the next day.

What I’m trying to get at with this reflection is that even though we are facing this problem globally, each human individual is facing their own emotions and own perspective of this pandemic. Let’s begin with kindness, and even if you don’t agree with what you see or hear, believe in a world of harmony where anyone is not treated as less.