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Day Job Survival Strategy

Working in the food industry was never my dream job, but it became one of the most formative day jobs I've had. I worked in a small, family-owned restaurant that was constantly short-staffed and almost always busy. There were only four servers scheduled at a time, even on weekends. Two handled takeout orders and the bar, while the other two worked the floor. It wasn't unusual to manage six tables at once, sometimes more if someone called out. At the time, I saw the job as completely unrelated to my long-term goals—just a way to make money. Looking back, I realize it taught me valuable survival skills that still apply to my life now.

One of the most important strategies I developed was learning how to prioritize under pressure. When multiple tables needed attention at once and the kitchen was moving fast, there was no time to panic. I learned to quickly decide what needed immediate attention and what could wait a few minutes. That ability to compartmentalize tasks helped me stay focused instead of overwhelmed, and it's something I still rely on in high-pressure situations today. I was also balancing competing interests, specifically a job and school at the same time. This often felt like major juggling. I would work long shifts and still have assignments due or classes the next day. Because of this, I learned to be flexible with my time. Instead of waiting for perfect study

conditions, I used whatever time I had available—before shifts, between responsibilities, or late at night. That discipline taught me how to manage my time realistically, not ideally.

Trusting co-workers was another lesson that came from working in such a small environment. In a place where everyone knows everyone, anything you say can spread quickly. I learned to treat conversations the same way I treat email: never say anything you wouldn't want repeated. Rather than venting or complaining, I focused on professionalism and solutions. This helped me avoid unnecessary drama and build trust, especially during stressful shifts when teamwork was essential.

Pursuing my long-term goals while working such a demanding job was challenging. After exhausting shifts, it was hard to find energy for anything else. At times, I felt frustrated that so much of my effort was going toward a job that didn't align with my goals. Eventually, I reframed my mindset. The job wasn't permanent—it was supporting my education and future opportunities. Seeing it as a stepping stone rather than a dead end made it easier to stay motivated. A character I strongly relate to from this experience is Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*. While our situations aren't the same, I connected with watching her work long hours and often take on everything by herself. Tiana views hard work as a way to reach something greater, not as the final goal. That mindset mirrored how I approached the restaurant job—pushing through exhaustion because I knew it wasn't where I would stay forever.

Knowing when to quit is another survival lesson, though I didn't get to make that choice myself. Instead of leaving on my own terms, I was let go for reasons out of my control. At the time, it was frustrating, especially after putting so much effort into the job. Looking back, I'm

grateful it came to an end. Being let go forced me to reflect on what I wanted and what kind of work environment I deserved. It closed a door I may not have closed myself.

Now, I'm thankful when I look at where I'm working today. I'm able to use the skills I developed—time management, adaptability, and staying composed under pressure—and I feel appreciated for my contributions. That difference has shown me the value of being in a space that recognizes your work. Although the restaurant job felt disconnected from my goals at the time, it helped shape the work ethic and resilience I carry with me into the next chapter.