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FYS Jobs: What Are Your Prospects?

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My First Job

In comparison to other people of my generation, my first work experience might not be as you would guess. Most high school and college students start off their work life in a restaurant, store, or even in independent work. I, on the other hand, started my work life in a trailer factory in Northeast Indiana called Jayco. Northeast Indiana is known for its trailer factory industry, and Jayco is among the top few companies. Jayco is quite a large factory. They have many buildings, an incredibly high work rate, and worst of all very rough hours to the average high school student. The whole idea of working like this was a new concept to me. I was certain this was going to be my greatest challenge. I proved myself to be right.

Both of my parents, two of my uncles, and one of my aunts work at Jayco all in different buildings. But they were not the ones I want to concentrate on. The real hero of the story was my step-brother; he recently got a job as a group leader in the flooring department of his building, so he had a little leeway. And he put that leeway to good use by getting me a job. I am so thankful that he did, he trusted me to be a good worker.

On a normal day, I would get up for school at approximately 7:30 A.M. Once I started work I needed to get up at 3 A.M. to start the work day at a quarter till 5 A.M. My shift started at 5 A.M. sharp every morning, and I needed to show up early to prepare everything I needed for the day because once the line starts rolling there is no stopping until break.

Regarding my job title, I was hired in as a front cap prep and windshield installation worker. But we only ran the units that used front caps at certain times during the year. I was lucky to be put directly onto the job for which they hired me. Front caps are put on the front of the chassis' of the more expensive units and they make the front look flat and very sleek. We worked on the front caps and from us they were directly installed on the line. My job had a lot of tedious and meticulous work. First I had to drop the 12 foot fiberglass cap from the racks so I could work on it. Next I would install the clearance lights, hook them up and test them. Following that I always drilled the holes for the wipers and the fluid cables. Afterwards I installed the grill, and finally I sprayed undercoating to the bottom ledge that separates the windshield from the underneath.

Since the prep work is done, the caps are then moved onto the carts to end up being rolled to the line. From the new position, I put on the rubber seal that the windshield is put in. Following that, I installed the windshield wipers and fluid cables. After that I always installed the removable hood. Now that the outer extremities are finished I send it down to my partners and they finished the job by installing the 150 pound windshield. They then seal the windshield inside the rubber seal and it is sent down to the line.

This simple job required a lot of different skills. I possessed approximately half going into the job and I developed the rest as I went. The practical applicable skills that I possessed were the simple ones the most everyone should have. For example: drilling, sawing, measuring, and stripping wires. But there were a few skills I needed to learn, and fast. For instance: crimping wires, sealing with caulk, changing blades, prepping undercoating, and putting the rubber windshield seals in.

Being a factory worker I built more than the applicable skills. I had learned much about time management; such as always knowing how much time I had to finish my job. Also I learned much more about organization. I always wore a tool belt to keep whatever I needed very close to me so that I didn't waste any time. To add to this, I developed a lot better listening and observational skills. In our factory, generally they showed us how to do the job just once and you are on your own from then on. Lastly, I learned that I always need to have a positive attitude. But honestly, there were times that I did not enjoy my work. I knew I just had to make the best of it so I could make it through the day.

The skills I listed above were nothing in comparison to the amount of skills that I learned throughout my whole time working there. I was hired in to work the front cap job, but that job was only seasonal and when those units were offline I was put into a swingman position. To be a swingman, one must be intelligent and able to comprehend important and complicated tasks quickly. A swingman must always be able to problem solve well. So I had a lot to live up to, and at first it was extremely difficult learning all of the different tasks that needed done when people were missing.

In my swingman job I did everything imaginable. Anywhere from installing generators to sweeping final campers, making radios to making valences or curtains, running missing wires in finished campers to gluing felt for floor boards. I've done a little bit of everything and that made me develop skills I never thought that I would have. Plus I learned a lot of critical thinking and problem solving skills; with my knowledge of a little of everything I can now put tasks together and use those skills to do tasks I have never done before. This is a very important skill now-a-days, because workers need to be able to think on their feet and propose a solution and then execute the solution to get a final product that functions correctly.

Will I ever use any of these skills? I believe that I will use almost every one of these skills at some point in my life, though maybe not in my professional career. But I will definitely use these skills in my personal time. The reason I love these hands-on activities is mainly because I love making things and wood-working. Plus I plan on going back to the factory and working during the summertime to help pay for college, so I will need every single one of these skills again.

I will probably not use all of the dangerous power tools in my professional career. Although, I shall use all of the lessons, skills, and experiences to aid my development in my athletic training and physical therapy careers. Critical thinking, problem solving, and observational skills will be used more frequently than others. As a physical therapist I need to be able to think of certain regiments for different individuals depending on their injuries. As well as identifying those certain injuries in the first place, quickly and without fail.

Some of the lessons that I learned while working will stay with me for the rest of my life. The job taught me the value of money and the value of hard work to get that money. I can't speak for anyone else, but I love the feeling of hard work and fair reward. Not all people realize how good they have it having a high paying factory job, but some do. And that's why no matter how lost I thought I was, there was always people willing to help, I just had to be friendly and find them. These are some of the lessons that I carry with me, and these are the lessons that I am going to use to my advantage in my professional career.

Jayco was probably one of the best things that I have done with my life. It taught me that work is not easy, work is hard, work will knock you down, and work is unforgiving. This trailer factory job is the main reason that I'm making sure I do well in college, so I don't have to spend my life in a factory setting. I am so glad that Jayco accepted my application; they gave me an opportunity and taught me so much along the way. I feel as though my factory working experience not only made me a better worker, but it also taught me valuable lessons about how this world operates and where I want to fit in at.