

First or Worst Jobs



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The first job I had, other than babysitting, was in a Ben Franklin store. Back in the day there were several other five-and-dime stores, the most well-known of which was Kresge and Woolworth. I worked after school and on weekends.

My boss's name was Mr. Harlowe, a nice man who owned the store and came to work every day in a suit and tie. The merchandise was laid out on flat tables and there was considerably less inventory than you would find today.

It was the job of the part-time employees, like myself, to help customers find what they needed, and to keep the counters neat and straightened. My first assignment was in the candy department. It contained bins, each with a different kind of candy in it, arranged in a square around a scale. I stood in the middle and weighed the candy for the customers. I scooped it up, placed it on the scale, and poured it into little waxed paper bags, on which I wrote the price. Here's the best part. Mr. Harlowe told me on the first day to help myself to any candy I wanted to eat during my shift. What?

"I can just eat the candy without paying?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "After about three days, you won't even want to look at the stuff, you'll be so sick of it. I figure I lose less money that way than by having my employees sneak it."

He was right, of course. At least the part about my being sick of it. I really couldn't see myself stealing it either, even if he hadn't offered it to me. Also, the candy all had sell-by dates and when it expired he let us take it home.

The proverbial kid in a candy store: that was my first job.

—Judy Andersen

In 1966, at age 18, I was a waitress at an upscale restaurant in western Pennsylvania. The restaurant was seasonal, which meant the owners weren't obligated to pay the \$1.25 per hour minimum wage. I was paid 65 cents an hour, from which 15 cents was deducted each hour to pay them for my dinner and break. So, I made, before taxes, 50 cents per hour plus tips, which were paltry because the kitchen took over an hour to get a meal to the table.

The upside of the job was I learned to like New York cheesecake, eating the slivers that remained after the cake was sectioned. The downside? I had to clean the men's restroom and wear a gray polyester uniform with a lacy apron.

I quit after a month of those jailhouse wages to become a lifeguard at a nearby state park. There I made \$1.40 per hour, earned my first vacation day, got a great tan and had a lot of fun. It made for a much better summer.

—Jody Magrady

A recent college grad, an unfocused, liberal arts type, applied for an entry level job and submitted a resume. One noteworthy item on the resume was the phrase 'cum laude', except preceding the honor was the word 'sans'. The cum laude part passed the electronic screen and the applicant landed an interview.

During their conversation, the manager glanced through the applicant's resume and stopped at 'sans cum laude'. He wasn't 100 percent sure what sans meant, but he knew there was something called magna cum laude, and one or two other versions of the distinction. He figured it was an entry level job after all, so he didn't give it any more thought.

The manager and the applicant hit it off famously, without too much scrutiny focused on the resume particulars. He offered the sans cum laude graduate the job, and he accepted.

—Michael Streett



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