

Life Under Duress

As a student I was lazy and complacent about my performance in school. I had absolutely no direction in life and chose the slacker take on things rather than being productive. My opinion was that I had no effect on anyone else's life and whatever I did was not important. My parents are the definition of hard-working and driven, but somehow such a lifestyle just seemed excessive to me. As much as they tried to encourage a more studious path I chose the other direction. It was not until I had the opportunity, during my summer job, to learn what my potential was and what benefit I could be to society.

Instead of pursuing college right after high school graduation I chose to get an apartment with some friends of mine that were also choosing a life of irresponsibility. I had a job interview on a Monday morning, but the night before I stayed up all night partying. The resulting effect of my choice was that I lost my wallet which contained my Drivers License and my Social Security card. These two things were needed for me to be accepted as a possible applicant for the job. I was backed into a corner and I really did not even care that much, the party the night before was a good time. It was at this time that a window of opportunity presented itself to me. Waiting in line to get a new license and social security card I was explaining to the friend that drove me there that I desperately needed to get a job. It was right then that a man who happened to be listening to our conversation offered to take me to dinner to discuss a job opportunity. I had heard many stories of people being seduced into a pyramid scheme so at first I was leery about the offer. I decided to take a chance, because let's be honest, I did not have much else going for me.

The gentleman explained how this job was a technical job and not a sales job which made my ears perk. Most jobs that are out there for guys my age were sales jobs. I am and never will be a

salesman. The job was as an alarm technician for a local summer sales company. He told me about how I would be able to travel across the United States and see things outside of Utah. This concept sold me on the job. The next thing I knew I was on my way to Baltimore, Maryland.

I was told my compensation would be based on the number of installations that I complete. I learned very quickly that the speed in which I complete the jobs was crucial to the amount of I would get paid for, in turn influence the check I would receive at the end of the summer. I easily found my ways of doing things to shave time here and there, but one part of my job proved to be particularly trying. Explaining to the customers how to use their brand new alarm system was something that could drive a sane-man crazy. I had to explain this to all walks of life: young, old, male, female, impaired and uneducated. I would try to get this part done as quickly as possible so, inevitably, I would not always explain everything I probably should have about the alarm. One day something was different. After spending a half an hour with an elderly lady trying to explain how to simply turn on and off the system I was ready to just give up. Instead of giving up however, I decided to explain one more thing to her and that was how to punch in the duress code. This is a special pass code on the alarm system that would send a panic signal to the monitoring station alerting them that the homeowner was being forced to disarm the system from an intruder. As I was walking out of her house, I was convinced she would not remember a word of what I had just taught her. At that point I had no confidence in the product that I was installing. I really thought that it would either not work the way they tell us it should or that the customer would never use it, but who was I to complain when it was a means to pay the bills.

A few months after my summer was over I received an email from someone I had never met before. The email explained to me that a few days before this email was written a man broke into an elderly woman's home. He kicked down her front door and in a panic she quickly hit her panic button that she wore around her neck. When the alarm went off the man forced her to turn off her alarm. She remembered that duress code that I had taught her and punched that in instead. The alarm stopped sounding off but the police still came. The alarm system that I installed actually saved her life. It was at

that moment that I asked myself, what would have happened to her if I had skipped that part to explain that code to her or if I tried to save time by omitting that step? It was at this moment that I realized that I in fact did and could have more of an effect on people. What I did with myself really did matter.

After that summer and the email that followed I did a lot of soul searching to try to figure out what I should be doing with my life. Should I stay on the fun and lazy track I was on and be a nobody or should I go to school and make something of myself? The answer was clear after I had my epiphany; I was going to school. Since that pivotal experience in my life I have put 100% into everything I do. I was promoted to Operations Manager for the office and I am on my third semester of college carrying a 3.9 GPA and am aspiring to work in the medical field after graduating. I often think of that elderly lady when I need a reminder that we all influence each other. I influenced her by saving her life and she influenced me by helping me realize that I need to live it.