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English 391

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Not Your Average Desk Job

If someone were to say the word “work” most people would think of the same thing. Putting on a suit and grabbing coffee to head to the office. From there one would sit in the dull grey cubicle and start typing up the annual report from 9 to 5, only to do it all over again the next day. All this nothingness just to make money. What most people forget is that there is a world of jobs out there for those not cut out for a desk job. One of these people is Emily Reese.

Emily’s job consists of putting on a graphic t-shirt and flannel before walking through the door into the half of a building that makes up her workplace. You would walk in to find a long wooden table, with enough seating for maybe 20 to 30 people. Sounds of old friends talking, glasses clinking, laughter, and the occasional triangle chime fill the air. If you were to look around at the details you would notice that the décor is quite unique. A chandelier of colored bras sways above people’s heads. A skeleton looks down on you as he rides a bicycle through the sky. Three TV’s play whatever is wanted, but hardly ever sports. Flattened beer cans line the walls like they themselves are the wallpaper. Above that are Polaroids documenting moments in other’s lives that will live on for years to come. Dollar bills sit stapled to the wall behind the counter, each signed by someone. They are autographs of those who take the time to come here. Other unique picker knick-knacks and murals from local artists fill up the empty holes on the walls and ceiling. The smell of over 100 craft beers and fried foods

enter your nose. Emily describes it as, "There was a party here, and you might have missed it, so make sure to come back when the party is going on." This place is Jack Browns.

Walking in you find an array of smiling faces, one of them being Emily. Someone who only got started in the business because she saw bartenders make more money than servers. It was never the plan, but sometimes you find your passions and learn how to handle life when you stray from the plan. That is what Emily did.

Bartending is more than just making drinks or serving beers to her. Twelve years between different downtown bars has taught her the most important skills one can have in today's society. These being compassion and understanding. Single guys will walk in and take a seat without saying much at first. They order a drink and then another and another from Emily. As she gives another bottle, that is when they open up to her. She sits and listens about their problems without judgement. Nodding and taking in every word leaving their mouths.

"I most often encounter people dealing with grief. I've learned to listen and empathize because of that. If these people are talking to their bartender, that means they don't have a good support system or they aren't reaching out the others in their lives," says Emily.

It is almost like becoming a therapist to these people. She lets them speak until they let it all out. There are the extremes though, that no one can see coming. A friend of hers once told her one of his stories. He had a customer come in that was drinking till he found the "courage" to commit suicide. He let this man speak to him until he was able to convince him not to go through with it. These bartenders can mean the difference between life and death for some. They need to get this credit.

Then there is the opposite end of the spectrum, those who are just ready to party. Because Jack Browns is in a college town, there is an abundance of college kids during the school year. The place fills up so much that Emily has to basically become a stick in order to squeeze past people to get back behind the bar.

The difficult part of these college nights, are the newly 21 year olds. "They are transitioning from hanging out mostly at house parties to then coming to the bar, because there are few to no rules at house parties, and at the bars there's often a lot of rules."

One of the most memorable experiences happened a few months back. It was any normal night at the bar. Emily was doing her thing making the tips she needed. One group, in their twenties, managed to get some clothes hangers and started to hit each other with them.

One of the drunken girls asked Emily to close out their tab. She walked over to the computer and printed out the tab before walking back to the group.

One started to complain, "I don't want to pay for this. I didn't order this and I didn't order these."

Emily stood there, both hands on the counter looking at them. Being the only sober one there she sighed and stated, "We are not the type of bar that will overcharge you guys. You ordered all the drinks that are printed on here, I promise."

They still continued to fight her over this, before Emily got fed up and waved to the bouncer. A large man made his way over to the bar. The small crowd parted for him, similar to how the Red Sea was parted by God. The group was asked to pay and leave. Emily took a deep breath, about to head to another customer before hearing the door slam to her right.

One of the women stormed in, any kindness she may have had left in her gone for the night. She leaned half way over the bar looking right at Emily. "You're a bitch. You can't kick us out....."

Emily looked straight at this woman, holding her tongue she politely, but sternly said, "I'm going to have to ask you to leave." The screaming kept on coming. "If you don't leave I'm going to have to physically remove you, because I've asked you three times now to leave. You're disturbing the whole environment."

The woman looked her dead in the eye, "Go ahead and try."

Emily looked back at her, "Alright, I just told you what I was going to do and you gave me permission." Emily took her time and walked around the bar, the woman's face showed a large amount of confusion. As soon as she got next to her the next few seconds were a blur. The end result was a full nelson and the woman was dragged outside. The woman had never shut up so fast in her life. Looking back on that moment Emily claims, "She never saw it coming."

Another instance occurred quite recently in Jack Browns. It is a known fact that men love their sports games, so when one is on all attention is toward whoever they are rooting for. Jack Browns doesn't always have games or fights on for an understandable reason, "It was a pay-per-view fight, we didn't have it, and it costs a shit load of money for businesses."

A group of three guys sat at the bar, and started mouthing off about not being able to watch some UFC fight. It was at the point of the night where the drunk slurs were starting. One asked for another round.

Emily said back, "Hey, I'm just going to be able to serve you water."

Two of the guys shrugged it off and got back to talking. The third, however, started to mouth off again.

"You need to chill, you can stay here and have some food, but I can't give you any beer," she replied back to the one guy.

The words left his mouth, almost in slow motion, "You're a bitch!"

She pointed towards the door as her blood boiled to the point where her face turned turned an unnatural color of red, "GET OUT, YOU GOTTA LEAVE!!!"

The guy went to leave but decided to turn around in the door way to have his final word. Before the words even got a chance to be said, Emily yelled, "ALL THE WAYYY."

But that is as crazy as it gets at Jack Browns. Sometimes you've had it with people. This just happened to be one of those times for Emily.

As a female bartender in today's world, they have to be able to hold their own. In an industry that is 60% female, one would hope they would be respected more. But unfortunately, there are creeps, perverts, and weirdos in the world that they have to learn to deal with, some more intrusive than others. Every situation has to be handled differently.

Emily explains, "If someone is giving me a compliment and I feel like they are being creepy, like if they say, 'Aw, you're so pretty.' I'll just say 'I know,' and then walk away. It's difficult too because some of the people are regulars who spend a lot of money here, so with some people you do kind of have to tow a line. Like if someone is definitely crossing lines, we have the freedom to tell them they are being inappropriate and we aren't going to serve them

anymore and I need you to pay your tab. And we will always be backed up. If we maybe didn't make the right decision, the way the business handles that is to say, 'Ok you're going to learn from this as a bartender and we support what you do.'"

The most invasive instance Emily had ever had to deal with was through social media. They seem to find her instantaneously, and request to friend her.

It was a quiet evening during a down day, Emily was sitting on her couch watching TV. She was scrolling through Facebook, when the message notification popped up. She clicked on it to find one of her regulars "sliding into her dms." The message consisted of a picture of the man holding a beer. But it wasn't a selfie, it was cropped to show from his stomach to about his mid thighs, thankfully all clothed, but with a very suggestive bulge. She describes it as, "A clothed dick pic." She was completely taken aback. She looked at it in disgust and never replied, proceeding to block the guy. Luckily, it is quite rare that she ever has to see him while working, but still a line had been crossed.

Despite the negative aspects of bartending, there are so many positives that outweigh them. The relationships, connections, and networks created are some. Emily says, "I met the majority of my acquaintance group from working there. You form a little tribe with your coworkers. When it's busy, you're going through the trenches together. There are just special relationships that form." The friendships don't end after the shift is over either. After a busy shift the team will sit along the bar, take their "shift-beer", and just hang out with one another while sharing experiences and life stories.

There is also the opportunity to work in a place that offers a large amount of diversity, which also offers the chance to learn. Emily says, "I was never that confident speaking Spanish, but this gives me the chance to speak Spanish with Spanish-speaking clientele which has been awesome. I like meeting new and different people. And it's never the same when you come in. I just don't know if I could do a desk job, but here I never know who is going to come in and what they are going to bring to the table and what we might talk about." One conversation about diversity stuck out in her mind above all rest.

A middle-aged lady took a seat at the bar and ordered a beer. Emily smiled and passed one to her. "How are you doing?"

The lady replied, "I'm doing well, how are you?" The normal conversation continued until the question of "What do you do for a living?" came up.

The lady explained, "I'm a foster parent. I am currently fostering a 14 year-old girl. She is in the transition between juvenile detention and going back to her family."

Emily was in awe. She had never met anyone who had fostered at all, let alone a teenager. The conversation continued with questions and answers.

Looking back, she said, "I don't know anybody who has fostered children. So getting to talk to them is getting to talk to people with a whole perspective on life and experience that I am completely disconnected from."

With bartending also comes the flexible hours. This offers any bartender the ability to do things outside of work that they want to follow through with. It gives them the chance to live their life, instead of their life being completely dominated by a job. This was Emily's biggest

reason to start bartending. With this flexibility, comes the chance to pursue the passion that she finds incredibly important in her life. This passion is her love of art. She brings this passion to life with her non-profit, *SHENANDOAH VALLEY ART MOBILE*. It is currently in the start-up phase with fundraising to buy a school bus to convert into an art studio and classroom for kids that want and need art back in their lives.

Picture it, a regular old school bus, but as soon as stepping inside colors take over every inch, instead of rows of seats. The smells of paints, clays, and pastels flow through the air. Drying paintings hover above, being held onto a string by clothe pins. Pottery sits on a shelf waiting to be transferred to a kiln. Everywhere someone looks is a new project to be started or a new technique to be learned.

“We want our first phase of programming to be an afterschool route, because there are not a lot of art space after school programing in the schools. Even if there are, all the kids who would benefit the most from that might not have transportation from a program, so they couldn’t stay if they wanted to.” She is so passionate about this because she knows kids need the arts. For every 600 children in school in the Harrisonburg community, there is one art teacher, which isn’t enough. She says, “There is a severe need for those services.”

Bartenders don’t have some simple job. There are so many aspects that go into it, it is multiple jobs in one. One day may require a therapist, but the next requires a wrestler. No day is the same, but it’s what so many people, including Emily, love to do. It is never boring and the benefits are endless. It requires the building of social skills, empathy, and courage to stand up for what is right. The biggest most important lesson Emily has learned applies to so much more

than just bartending. It applies to life in general and is something all humans should understand. She says, "It has taught me to just really value human relationships and how much what you do and say matters. Even if you maybe think you are never going to see somebody again, you can have a positive impact on them. You don't know when you'll connect with them again in the future. Making sure I'm valuing the people around me as much as possible."

Bartending is truly unlike any other job you can have in this world, so next time you stop by your local bar make sure to say Thank you.