

# Changing Expectations

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Myself and millions of other young people are facing a harsh reality these days. Simply put, the “American Dream” from decades ago feels like it was a goal decades ago. It’s morphed into an idealistic plot you’d see in a movie, where you have to shut your brain off to enjoy and believe what you’re seeing. For several years, I’ve been trying to grind with two big economic goals in mind: getting a place to call my own, and a new vehicle (in that order). In a couple ways, I can see that steady progress is being made. In a few other areas, it feels like the finish line is getting further away with each passing day. If I search around on the internet, I find forums and threads with so many other people that have anxieties and frustrations just like mine, if not worse. While it’s human to feel better when many others are in the same boat, no one wants to be in this boat at all.

This isn’t meant to be some tribalist “things are so much tougher in my day” rambling. It’s more of me taking a look at conditions out of my control, and re-thinking my goals and priorities. There is a bit of a generational divide in some ways. Thankfully, I haven’t really experienced this from people I personally know. However, it’s very easy to find examples of this attitude online. “Nobody wants to work anymore.” By and large this way of thinking is utter bullshit. Of course, there are cases where those in the younger generations don’t have a strong work ethic. People don’t always dedicate themselves to the job and what it entails. That’s just a fact. Not every person walking the planet has that attitude where they get shit done at their job.

But, each and every time a company complains about how difficult it is to find and keep good help, too often it gets accepted right away that this is attributed to people not wanting to work. I feel as though I can speak accurately towards this divide as I’ve been in this position myself. Years ago, there was a time where I had interest in security/law enforcement career opportunities. Knowing that getting experience would be crucial if I wanted to continue on this path, I applied to some security positions. As it turned out, I landed a job as a Security Officer with a contractor, G4S. G4S handled security for the company Caterpillar in my area. It was here that I had the most miserable work experience of my life. At G4S, I found myself where so many younger people have at one time or another; working a low level job for low

level pay where being good at your job was about the worst thing you could be.

I don't want to go too far into it, but from day one, I showed up and put everything into the job. My co-workers seemed to take to me very quickly because I took things seriously. I asked questions when I didn't know, showed up each and every day on time, did things that weren't even asked of me, and so on. There was a steely determination to do the best job that I possibly could. Very soon after I started, the red flags began to appear. Training was lackluster considering the responsibilities of the position. Immediately, I found that the turnover rate of employees was alarmingly high. To the earlier point, there were a few shitty workers who do add a little fuel to the "nobody wants to work" fire. However, my experience would gravitate further away from that way of thinking. Because of people leaving or calling out, there were many shifts that had to be covered. One of my (negative) qualities is that at work, when I'm asked to do something, I have a very hard time saying "no." This can truly be a terrible quality to have in the workplace.

At G4S, I found this out the hard way. My time here lasted around fourteen months. I worked 3rd shift the entire time I was there. The company quickly found out that they could depend on me. This would constantly mean being asked to cover half of the next shift. Many twelve hour shifts. In fact, I worked there for several months before I received my first paycheck that was just eighty hours. You might think the silver lining is that I was making some decent money with all that overtime. Yes and no. For a Security Officer position (basically bottom of the barrel job/security guard), the \$14/hr wage was actually pretty good. It's sad in a profession these days when \$14/hr is on the pretty high side of the scale. After taxes and all that good stuff was taken out, what I actually took home for a year was maybe slightly over \$20,000. Needless to say, some of the people I worked with had another job. Working full time in that position simply wasn't enough to get by. If I had my own family or a place of my own at that time, it wouldn't even be close to a living wage.

I clearly became the go-to person to ask to come into work four hours early, or stay four hours late. In essence, being a good security officer at G4S resulted in constantly being asked to pick up more hours. Which I did. Now, about those red flags that started popping up. So how did I benefit from being a good employee who (from what co-workers told me) went way beyond what was expected of me? I made money that was ever so slightly closer to a living

wage. By the way, I had to work there for a full year before I earned any paid time off. Management never sent any compliments my way or spoke to me about any potential future with the company. Virtually no opportunities for advancement existed. If they did exist, it would've meant much more responsibility for a minuscule pay increase. When spots opened up in the more desirable first or second shifts, there was no push for the company to consider moving me over. The sad point being there was no reason for me to give a shit and do my best. I did, but that was because of my own outlook, not because of any carrot the company was dangling in front of me.

It wasn't just working a lot of twelve hour shifts. I worked a decent amount of my off days too, because as established, I was an idiot that would keep doing these things when asked. So on a couple occasions, I ended up working twelve days without a day off. By the way, yes, this is actually legal in the security industry. Trust me when I say I looked this up to satisfy my own curiosity. In the midst of one of these twelve day streaks, my facial hair got a little scruffier than I usually kept it. One of the older employees in the building complained about it, and a supervisor came in the next day to tell me I was going to shave my face before the next shift. There was no understanding that I was working so many days without a day off. This sums up the relationship security contractors have with the companies they handle security for. When the big wigs are unhappy and complain about something, us Security Officers would be the ones that inevitably ate that shit.

Few things are more demoralizing than working a job where you're treated like garbage. I've lived it. I worked at another job more recently where a few of those same red flags showed up. It can be even more demoralizing to feel the onset of that feeling where the harder you work and the better job you do, you get exploited or taken advantage of, at a minimal or complete lack of benefit for yourself. Saying all of this isn't meant to drum up any sympathy. Even though I've been absolutely miserable at different jobs, you can still learn valuable (albeit hard) lessons this way. But, with these experiences under my belt, I'm wiser when it comes to setting expectations.

When things are said about today's culture and people not wanting to work, I wish employers who are understaffed would look inwardly to assess their workplace. I'm not trying to say the issues lie strictly with employers. However, blame shouldn't be put 100% at the employees' feet in such matters. Employers can always ask themselves more questions. Employees are often

asked to do more in their lines of work. Surely it's not out of the question to ask employers to do more for their own people. Are you TRULY offering a competitive salary to your workers? Do you encourage employees to take time off work when it's available to them? Does your job listing accurately portray what is to be expected of them? Do you let your employees know you appreciate the job they're doing for you? These are just a few of the questions employers could ask themselves. If you continue to have a high turnover rate, your company might be the common denominator in that whole mess.

Being treated like expendable crap from an employer is one thing. It's not easy to deal with, but it's worse if you're not getting much out of it. People can tolerate a lot in the workplace if they're making a comfortable living, have a manageable work/life balance, have good benefits, and so on. Lots of times you see companies bitching about how hard it is to find or keep workers, there are boxes you find out you can usually tick. The pay is less than a living wage. Check. You heap more of a workload and responsibilities on the workers you have. Check. You have no benefits or ones that don't make up for the low pay scale. Check. Sometimes, for employers, they might just have bad luck or happen to hire the wrong people. This absolutely happens and doesn't by any means insinuate that every employer struggling to hire a workforce is a bad company to work for.

Overall, though, I think the notion that people don't want to work today is laughable and completely misses the mark. I can only speak with experience as to how things are in the United States. Everything is expensive. Prices for gas, groceries, vehicles, homes, apartments. You name it. It probably costs more than it did a handful of years ago. What makes this so tough for people? Well, when the price of everything goes up and the wages for jobs don't increase too, that's how to get to what 2023 has to offer. I think this is where that divide comes in and older generations don't always understand the frustrations of today. Decades ago, I could've gone into the workforce right out of high school, gotten some factory job, and been able to afford a house, gotten married, and had a kid or two. It might not have been a luxurious lifestyle, but it was well within the realm of possibility. Today, if someone right out of high school gets a factory job, they'll probably have to continue living at home because they can't afford the high rent prices in their area. Forget the notion of getting married and starting a family. No way in hell.

In the last five or six years, I've spent quite a bit of time looking for and applying to jobs. Without a doubt, that process creeps me closer to the edge of depression than anything else I've dealt with. Simply put, I wouldn't wish that process on anyone. Let me summarize what the job market is like today: It's abysmal. Oftentimes, questionable or sometimes downright shady tactics are used when jobs get posted. The responsibilities of the job are so vague that when you apply, you still don't have a clear idea of what the job is. Or, the job is shown under your search results as entry level, even though the job is looking for five or more years of professional experience. Or, they offer competitive salary. Whatever the hell that means. To summarize, jobs aren't listed accurately. You'll find mid or senior level jobs when looking strictly for entry level work. Let's say you're a college graduate and you start scrolling through a job that looks right up your alley. You're an English Major (use myself as an example) and the responsibilities include communicating on behalf of the company. Composing emails. Editing and writing messages for discussions with clients. An English bachelor's degree is one of the few that they specifically want. Where's the catch? This sounds like a dream job that fell right in my lap. You scroll down to the last bullet point. Salary range is \$30-35,000. Boom goes the dynamite.

That's the sort of example you'll commonly see when looking for jobs these days. The requirements are pretty high. When you feel like you meet them, you find that said high requirements don't even pay a wage that would allow you to live comfortably. So when you mix a terrible job market with ridiculously high costs of almost everything, you get yourself a perfect storm. This perfect storm consists of:

- people staying single because they can't afford to start a family
- living at home with their parents in their twenties or thirties, or having to move back home
- people having to work multiple jobs just to support themselves
- people moving to another part of the country where the cost of living isn't as high, not because of a lower paying job or any such factors, but because they can no longer afford to live the life they were comfortably living

I've had to take an in-depth look at my own situation. In some ways, I'm super fortunate to be where I am. I have an amazing family that helped me so much while I was earning my bachelor's degree. They're the reason why I left

without a mountain of debt to worry about. I'm thirty-five, single, and still live at home with my parents. My parents have never tried to kick me out, and have allowed me save up a chunk of money so when I'm ready to do so, I can confidently spread my wings. One of the biggest blessings is that I have a career working for my family available to me. An opportunity that so many don't have. Every day, I'm glad for what I've got.

Even my position still has lots of frustrations and challenges. Last year I found myself in the situation where I have enough money in the bank to finally start looking for a home of my own. In my thirty-five years, right now seems to be all accounts, be the worst possible time I've lived in as far as looking to buy a home. So that's great. Finally ready to make the big move and I'm met with high home costs, high interest rates, and homes being sold a day or two after they're listed. My priority is getting my own place, but I've also been putting money aside with the second goal of getting myself a new vehicle. My truck is the only vehicle I've ever had. Nineteen years and counting.

If I feel like having a shitty day, I can go on Realtor.com and look at homes currently listed. What's more is with this site, I can even view what these homes previously sold for, and see how much the prices have increased. Can this sometimes be attributed to homes being fixed up and in a much nicer state than they were five or ten years ago? Of course. When the time eventually comes, I had planned on getting a new truck. Yeah, vehicle prices are high too. Even worse, because of the chips in newer vehicles for their computers, vehicles are harder to find in stock. These factors all contribute to a feeling where even when my bank accounts continue to grow, the actual goals of what I want to do with that money seem like they're never getting any closer. That's ultimately what I'm trying to say in all this. What was once a comfortable life two or three decades ago is not even close to comfortable today.

I have no idea if the data backs it up, but I wouldn't be surprised in the least if anxiety and depression cases were skyrocketing (especially in younger generations). So please forgive me if I roll my eyes when I hear the "nobody wants to work" garbage. We all know, or should know, that there's so much more to it than that. Going back to the example of my security job, I didn't put my two weeks in because I didn't want to work. I didn't want to work there, where I was treated like shit by the company, where the job itself was a dead end, and to top it all off, I wasn't making a living wage. In my opinion, a lot of

the times I see people talk about nobody wanting to work, that opinion is coming from someone that hasn't applied to jobs in a long time or they haven't tried to buy a home in a long time, or they started their own family a long time ago. If they tried to do any of those things today, they'd fully understand where the frustration comes from. Tasks like finding a new and good job, and raising a family, are things that were almost expected of people by their early twenties decades ago. These days, they feel like steep mountains to climb. The peak is obscured by dense clouds to the point where you can't even see where it ends.