

Interview with Lehi D.

Interviewed by Commercial Support Services – Richmond
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Lehi was born in Jamaica and moved to the United States less than ten years ago. Growing up, he did not receive any formal education. Once living in the U.S., Lehi experienced a seizure due to having fluid on his brain; he now has a shunt to relieve the pressure. Lehi was introduced to the Department of Rehab who referred him to Commercial Support Services in 2015. In his time with CSS, he has found full time employment as a janitor, and then moved on to be a valet at the Marriott Hotel in Oakland. In June, Lehi was promoted to the site supervisor. In this position, he works full time and oversees a crew of 6 staff.

1. What has been the best part about working?

I like working at USA parking because I like driving fancy cars and I like what I do. I never thought I would have the chance to do this, especially to drive the nice cars, which is the fun part. I have always really liked cars, so my job is great for me. I also really like the crew of people I have working on my team, it's a nice environment to work in. But, it can be very challenging. I go to meetings with the hotel managers, supervisors, accountants, housekeepers, and maintenance staff. And, when someone on my team calls off, I have to cover their shift. If people are off, I'm always the one to cover. But it's been a nice experience even though I have to do that.

2. How does your job make a difference in your life?

It's changed my life, and it makes a difference in every way. Making more money has helped a lot with taking care of my daughter, and I get to dress a lot nicer now for work because my position as a supervisor requires it. It's given me experience and if my crew has a problem they call me. I'm the first one they call and my phone is always ringing. This morning I got a call because there was a problem and the crew didn't know what to do so they called me for an answer. In Jamaica we have a saying, "I feel like I'm here, not there, but here, I started at zero, then I went to 1 driving cars, and 2 as a supervisor. Who knows what 3 will be." But I am happy, and have no complaints.

3. Tell me about your experience working with CSS.

It's been nice, and really great. Everyone here is awesome! They have faith in me. I know I called a lot at the beginning, but now I can manage and don't have to call as much. I like that I can call for advice. I know what I should do at work, but sometimes I want to talk about it with staff at CSS. For example, when I had to fire someone recently, I knew I had to talk to my boss, talk to HR, get a statement, etc. But I wanted to call CSS too. Keep doing your good work here. Respect.

4. If you could give advice to a person thinking about going to work, what would it be?

It will be difficult at first. Slow at the beginning, but anyone who is reading this, I hope it can give you motivation or inspiration. Nothing may happen at first, but pull your head up above the water and have faith. Miracles happen!



In my experience, I can say that if I am feeling down or don't want to get out of bed, I just tell myself I need to get up and brush my teeth and smile. I pray, and look at myself in the mirror to get through the day. Sometimes I don't want to go to work, I know it's hard and it's difficult but you have to get up and go do it. Lazy can't pay the rent! Don't give up, keep pushing because dreams come true!

5. What does it mean for you to go from a janitorial worker to a supervisor?

It's a great change and I know that I have to work hard to see the results because people [supervisors] are watching. It was hard to be a janitor. It was rough because sometimes the supervisor would come and tell me to start over and clean the whole building again because it wasn't clean enough. But I didn't give up. I would start over because I wanted everything to look perfect.

At the hotel now, the manager recommends to work hard and not be lazy. He says don't follow bad company, just come to work and do your job. I know they were watching me in my last position, and now I am a supervisor. It's all worth the hard work.

6. What would you say about coming from Jamaica vs. where you are now in the U.S?

It has been rough coming from Jamaica. It's not easy because in my job back home, I was scuba diving and horseback riding, and then I came to America. I tried school for a little bit, and then I had a baby and have had to raise her on my own. It's been very hard, and it's not easy.

Sometimes I just look at myself in the mirror and I say, Lehi, you can do this! And here I am now, a supervisor, living the American Dream. I was driving a Rolls Royce this Saturday and I thought, "Wow! I can't believe I am here now!"

It's a very good feeling, and my bosses and supervisors are so excellent. The boss now is the best I've ever had; he works with me and wants to know how I think he can make things better. He will ask my opinion about something and then come back the next day and say, "Lehi, you are smart." I also thank CSS and my DOR counselor, because she is the one who made this all possible for me.