

Nickel and dimed essay



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Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America| March 29 2009 A riveting tale about the world of low class workers, Ehrenreich puts into words what most are don't acknowledge or are afraid to acknowledge. Through first-hand experience, Ehrenreich successfully navigates her way through the low wage work by working such common low wage jobs as waitressing, housecleaning, and sales. While along the way discovering that each job encompasses their own organizational structure, culture, and identity that she is focused to discover and conform with while being paid no more than \$7. 00 an hour and even at some points as little as \$2. 3 (plus tips). Ehrenreich persuasively forces us to realize that the American dream is slowly slipping away. No longer is America the land of opportunity where hard work pays off, instead millions are suffering in route to servicing to their rich counterparts. The tale begins in Key West, which outsiders describe as a “ real treat” and a “ vacation you're still talking about” (Key West website, 2009, para 1), but as soon to be learned turns out to be a struggle and anything but a treat for anyone wishing to obtain who what others consider “ unspecialized work” and live in non-moving lodging.

Barbara starts her low wage job at a place called the Hearthside, where she works as a waitress. She quickly learns about the organizational structure accompanying this position. As described in Organizational Communication in an Age of Globalization, a hierarchy “ refers to the vertical levels of an organization. It represents the distribution of authority among organizational roles or positions” (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, Ganesh, pg. 21) It is here at Hearthside, Barbara gets a taste of the real word application of this structure. Hearthside is composed a hierarchy.

There are several employees, which remain on a lower vertical level, like Gail and Barbara. These employees are superseded and monitored by an assistant manager, Stu and Stu is superseded by other management working within the organization, like Phillip. Phillip is described as the “ top manager except for an occasional consultant sent by corporate headquarters”.

(Ehrenreich pg. 23) While distant and not physically there, corporate headquarters oversees and supersedes Phillip and is at the top of the Hearthside’s hierarchy triangle. Of course to some degree there is differentiation and specialization within the Hearthside. Specialization refers to the role-specific behavior that focuses on certain duties and activities and differentiation refers to the state of segmentation in an organization that divides it into specific groupings. ” (Banner and Gagne, pg 133) So for example this is demonstrated at the Hearthside through the division of labor. Gail and Barbara work as waitresses, Joan works a hostess, Claude works as a cook, Stu and Phillip as management, and I’m sure there are several other departments within the Hearthside, like maintenance and purchasing that are not discussed, due to lack of interaction.

Also Hearthside does have a level of formalization, “ the degree to which interactions in the organizations are characterized by rules, regulations, and norms”. (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh, pg. 22) This becomes evident on page 23, when the mandatory meeting is discussed. Phillip, the manager, discusses the how employees are no longer to “ gossip” with each other on the clock or eat at the restaurant when off duty. Also the amount of croutons they are allowed to put on the salad is even mandated to six and what their required to wear to work is also mandated.

Perhaps far more interesting than the structure of the Hearthside, is the culture of the Hearthside. Most simply put the organizational culture of an organization is the “ personality of the organization”. (Free Management Library website, 2008, para 1) At the Hearthside, employees strengthen their bonds and culture through making fun of management and their dislike of Stu. For example “ Lionel, the busboy, entertains us for the rest of the shift by standing just behind Stu’s back and sucking deliriously on an imaginary joint or maybe a pipe”. (Ehrenreich pg. 5) A strong culture is said to exist where staff respond to stimulus because of their alignment to organizational values. (Dayton Business Journal website, 2002, para 1) Therefore, the Hearthside can be said to have a strong organizational culture. This is demonstrated through the employee’s dedication to the same goal of providing quality service. This can be seen through Gail as she attempted to provide extra croutons on the salad, waitresses using tip money to provide a customer with a meal, the cooks cooking the food in a quality way and having the food out on-time, and even the dishwashers taking some sort of pride in accomplishing the dishes in a timely matter. Ironically the biggest detriment to providing quality service at the Hearthside was management and their stingy policies, which demand a mandated amount of sour cream or croutons.