

## The Life of an “Essential” Worker

Hello Everyone! My name is Bryanna Payden, a second year Biology major at California State University Sacramento with aspirations to attend medical school and specialize in Psychiatry. If being a Biology major wasn't challenging enough, I am a full-time Assistant Manager at Jamba Juice. Additionally, I serve as the Logistics Coordinator for the Honors College Committee. I like to keep myself fairly busy and during this crisis I had to find a new way to continue my responsibilities.

In the early stages of the COVID-19, our community was very confused, scared, and unsure of what to expect next. Little by little as a virus spread in different areas of the world, all colleges began to transfer online. I remember when CSU Sac State's President Nelson sent the email that the remaining academic sessions will be held online. While sitting in my honors US history class, I read the email on my phone with disbelief. Initially I was super excited, assuming what all college students thought, online classes would be easier.... boy I was naive. Shortly after, our Governor Newsom addressed the state of California with the decision of a one month quarantine. During this stay at home quarantine, it is advised no one is able leave their homes unless for essential businesses such as grocery shopping or hospital visits. Once again I was super excited to finally stop working and become solely invested in my school work. I assumed that Jamba Juice was not an essential business, however, the economy thought of me differently... Jamba Juice was considered essential as it is a part of the food industry.

As a manager my first priority is always the safety of my team. Even with a well known company such as Jamba Juice, our franchise was not prepared for or equipped to handle this unprecedented pandemic. There were no prior documents to refer to for any prior training we had to address any of these circumstances. At that moment, Jamba had nothing prepared; no hazard pay, no paid time off, no protection, or any guidance that I could have referred to. I remember feeling worried about the safety and financial stability of those employees who couldn't work due to elderly family members being more at risk. With the addition of this new stress, life continued to move on.

During the first month of the stay home quarantine, March through April, we continued to work as “normal”. We still had our lobby and tables set out and our team had no personal protections of gloves or face masks. It was honestly as if you went to work any other day. The major difference was that our store was not grossing in sales as much as it used to. I work at a location that typically brings in \$3,000 to \$4,000 a day, our sales drastically dropped to \$500. We went from seeing about 300 people a day to only 50. At first it felt unreal. It felt as if I was living in a parallel universe where the streets were empty, no people out walking, just vast empty parking lots. It felt as if life just clicked the pause button.

In the following month, things began to drastically change. At my job there were new orders and regulations almost every week. The first new task was a rigorous sanitization checklist where every 15 minutes, we have to sanitize and wipe down all of the door handles, lobby tables, counters, the pens, the scoops, the doors, etc. Then we would have to take that sheet

and send a picture to our district manager every hour. Still no face mask or gloves were required for us to wear. The following week we had to remove our tables from the lobby as no guests were allowed to dine in at our store anymore and we had pre-assigned standing spots for our guest to wait six feet apart. We could not have more than six people in our lobby or we would be shut down mandated by Sacramento County. Jamba also created a new document where employees who felt uncomfortable to work were allowed to leave for up to 30 days unpaid. Some of my employees decided to opt out as working was too much of a risk to bring home to their families. To this day, some of those workers have not returned. Also another strict regulation was that due to the decrease in sales, we were only allowed minimum staffing. During this time, we went from scheduling about 45 hours a day to only 25. Regardless of how busy we were throughout the day, we were only allowed to run two people. This meant less hours for my co-workers and a drastic cut on everyone's incomes. We encourage our employees to apply for unemployment to collect extra money to make up for the lack of income. We were all reassured by the fact that the quarantine would only last a month, but clearly that was not the case.

The stay-at-home quarantine was extended from the end of April to the end of May. I am certain that even after we begin to reopen many of these practices will remain in place. Recently, Jamba Juice issued stricter regulations to ensure employees and customers are taking the precautionary measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. There is a sanitization checklist that is checked every 15 minutes and is heavily enforced. Also, new protection for employees such as splash guards protect the registers and our POS system. In the beginning of May we received a three dollar raise and additional paid sick leave. Now, all workers are required to wear face masks and gloves. In the beginning, it was frustrating working in conditions that took so long to address the virus but my experience goes to prove how unprepared we were. My store is still adjusting to this new normal and I appreciate how patient our customers have been.

This whole experience has honestly been hard to describe. The only word that comes to mind is unreal, I am in disbelief that these circumstances are now my everyday life. The crazy thing is the added anxiety and stress surrounding COVID-19 added to my already busy life. After work, I came home and attended all of my classes, completed assignments, and prepared for major tests. The next day I woke up at 6 a.m. to continue this exhausting cycle. COVID-19 not only disrupted my routine but it affected everyone. This is a crazy world to be living in, especially those of essential workers who worry about contracting the virus every time they clock in. I never thought I would have to choose between my safety and supporting myself. Nevertheless, I recognize this predicament and as Assistant Manager I ensure my staff feels protected and supported.