



“Time is more value than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time. “

This will probably sound like a long, lengthy, rant, but just bear with me. When people ask me what I do for employment, I reply I work as a peer specialist. The first question I always get asked is “What is that?” I try to explain it in layman’s terms, so they have a better understanding of what it is I do. The second question I always get asked is “Why are a peer specialist when you have a degree in something else?” I go on to explain even if I would have gone with my other degree choice, that yes, I would be making much more money, but at the same time I would have no life. I would be always on the road, and I would also be far away from any kind of support system. I realized later in my school years that perhaps this is not something I necessarily wanted to do for a career.

It was around this time I decided to go back to school at St. Cloud Technical College for an Eligibility Worker Degree, so I could help others who were having a hard time in life. The whole time I was also working at Independent Lifestyles as a peer mentor. Even though I didn’t get paid much, being a peer mentor was something I enjoyed, but I never really thought about doing it for serious employment.

After I graduated in 2013, I looked for over a year to find a job. I submitted numerous resumes and had some interviews, but I would never hear anything back. It was at times like these I started to think perhaps it was me or something I was doing wrong. As a result of negative self-talk and not hearing anything from job applications my mental health started to deteriorate. I believed things were turning around for me when I was finally hired part time at St. Cloud HRA as a Section 8 worker in 2014. I started to become overwhelmed and stressed almost immediately, and my mental health began to suffer. After three months, I was unable to continue with my job at HRA.

In the months that followed, I had to spend a few days in crisis because of suicide ideation, followed by a lengthy stay at partial hospitalization. It was there I finally realized maybe I didn’t need to work at a job that used my degree(s) after all. I went through peer specialist training in 2016 not really expecting much to come from it. When I saw the Northway IRT had a position open for a certified peer specialist, in March of 2018, I decided to apply and was hired. I was very nervous about starting a new job, but I felt I needed to step out of my comfort zone. I also have the advantage of having wonderful supervisors who are very understanding of my circumstances. They are always willing to listen to me and help with any problems I might be having. I discovered by sharing my own personal story, it helped others deal with their own struggles. Sharing my story not only helps others, I’ve discovered it also helps me by giving my life some meaning.

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We are the evidence; We hold the hope.