



## Mini-Mart Surprise

by Beverly Ryle

Summertime and the living is easy—but not for a Mini-Mart cashier at a rest stop on the Mass Pike.

That was the assumption I made when I stopped there for an iced coffee on a hot, sunny Saturday last summer on my way to visit family in Connecticut.

The store was packed. A long line of customers in a hurry to be somewhere else snaked its way around the junk food displays, inching slowly toward the older woman on the other side of the counter.

"What an awfully hard job," I thought, as I watched her selling lottery tickets and sodas.

The weather outside is beautiful, and you're stuck inside. You're on your feet all day, under constant pressure from impatient, sometimes rude people. You're exhausted at the end of your shift and you don't have much of in the way of material reward to show for it.

But even as I was creating this scenario in my head, I still was able to take in the attentive cheerfulness with which she waited on those who preceded me.

It doesn't matter where you are working, what circumstances you are working under, or at what level you are working, as long as you are satisfying what is important to you.

This observation would later help me to understand how my storyline could be so off-base. Unfortunately it didn't stop me from saying something intended as kind, but which was actually patronizing.

"I hope you're able to find some relaxation and enjoyment today," I said to the woman as she handed me my change. I pictured her freed at last from the tedium of the work, out of the uniform, under the shade of a tree sipping iced tea.

With the same patience that she had been showing toward everyone else in line, she said, "Oh, I'm enjoying myself now. I love this job!" She smiled and beckoned to the next customer.

### WORK VALUES

"Wow!" I said to myself as I walked to my car. "What a lesson in humility."

I had congratulated myself for trying to see myself in her shoes, but as it turned out, my musings were more akin to professional arrogance than empathy. Here I go about teaching others that work is what you make of it, and then I go and make such a stereotypical judgment about what does or does not constitute meaningful work for someone.

Back on the highway, I asked myself why a person might find working as a cashier satisfying, and I thought about the list of work values I use with my clients.

I ask them to consider work as: an activity, a community, competence, competition, a contribution, a home base, income, pleasure, self-actualization, and structure.

Then I ask them to place a value on these items by prioritizing them according to their importance.

As I reflected on my cashier's choice of a job at the Mini-Mart in terms of work values, I began to see her situation differently.

Perhaps she values work as a community and she's drawn to the social aspects: meeting the public or being part of a team. Maybe work as a contribution is important to her and she enjoys serving others.

Maybe she's retired, and a few shifts at the Mini-Mart provide needed extra income. Or maybe work as structure is a priority to her and she likes the Mini-Mart because it gets her out of the house.

Work values represent the internal motivation behind a career choice, and they are just as relevant to a Mini-Mart cashier as they are to a CEO. It doesn't matter where you are working, what circumstances you are working under, or at what level you are working, as long as you are satisfying what is important to you.



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