

A Hotel Worker Navigates Covid-19

Eva Tejada

BEFORE YOU READ: What do you think happened to hotel workers during the pandemic? Why?

Cleaning during Covid

Covid-19 started in March 2020 and people were scared. People stopped taking plane flights and stopped staying in airport hotels. I work at the Hilton Hotel at Logan Airport in Boston. The hotel has stayed open even though we have fewer customers. Because of the pandemic, cleaning each room takes much longer. We must wear a mask and gloves, and it gets uncomfortable. We do extra cleaning in each room to guarantee 100% cleanliness. We can't enter a room until three hours after a customer leaves. It is stressful if a customer leaves later in the day.

In June 2020, I got Covid-19 when I was working at the hotel. I had to stay home for six weeks. I was laid off, and I applied for benefits. I live in a house with my daughter, my husband, and another renter. I had to quarantine from my family. We stayed in separate rooms and used the kitchen at different times. My husband got Covid-19 after me, but both my daughter and the renter did not get sick. My husband and I had fevers



and felt tired, but we got better in a few weeks.

A Hard Year for My Family and Many Others

My mother, who lives in El Salvador, was sick before the pandemic started. I wanted to see her, but I was scared to travel. I finally visited her a year after the pandemic started. She was very sick and in a coma. After a few days, she passed away. I had to take a Covid-19 test to get into El Salvador and to leave El Salvador, but it was worth it. I saw my mother one more time. We said goodbye.

This year has been hard for my family and me, and for many people. I hope that things will get better in the future.

What Benefits Do You Get?

A living wage—You earn enough to support yourself and your family.

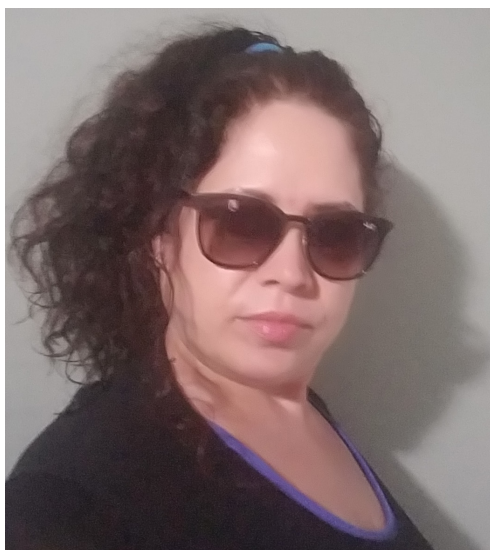
Health insurance—Your job covers all or some of the cost of insurance.

Retirement—Your employer provides a pension or contributes to a retirement fund.

Job security—You have some guarantee that you won't be fired without cause.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Using evidence from the text, what are three ways Eva's work was affected by the pandemic?
2. What other ways was the pandemic year hard for Eva?
3. Eva Tejada is paid by the hour. Compare her experience to Vuong Cao (pp. 8-9). Which kind of job would you rather have? Why?
4. Read Eva's bio. (below). Note that her English class is provided by her union, UNITE HERE, Local 26. What other benefits do you think she receives as a union member? Learn more at unitehere.org and watch short videos of UNITE HERE members sharing their experience in the union.
5. If you are exploring careers, does it make sense to consider the role of unions in that career? Why or why not?
6. Learn more about unions by studying the graphs created by Mark Trushkowsky (pp. 12-13).



Eva Tejada is in the Intermediate English Class at BEST Hospitality Training, a project of the hotel workers union, UNITE HERE, Local 26. She is from El Salvador and immigrated to the United States in 1987. She works at the Logan Hilton Hotel in Boston, MA, and lives with her husband and daughter. She enjoys cooking, jump-roping, and singing Christian songs with her karaoke machine.



Workers of the Palace Hotel (part of Marriott Hotels) in San Francisco strike for higher wages, workplace security, and job safety in October 2018. Photo by Bastian Greshake Tzovaras from commons.wikimedia.org. What do you think of the slogan, "One job should be enough"?

What Is a Union?

Workers form a union so they can bargain *collectively* for better pay, benefits, and conditions. If you don't have a union, you bargain *individually* with your employer.

As a worker, what are the pros and cons of bargaining collectively?

As an employer, would you rather negotiate collectively or individually with your workers?