

Stress of Being a Restaurant Worker

Worrying Doesn't Help

Edwin Peña

BEFORE YOU READ: Most of the articles in this section have been about how workers advocated for their physical safety. Read the title of this article. What do you think this article will be about?

We Were All Afraid, But My Mom Taught Me an Important Lesson

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was chaos in the restaurant where I work. We were all afraid of losing our jobs. (How would we pay the bills?) And we were afraid of keeping our jobs. (Would we get sick and maybe even die? If our children got sick, how would we take care of them?)

Eventually, about half of the employees at my restaurant lost their jobs. I have worked at this restaurant for 12 years.

I learned that from my mom, who is one of the most patient people I know.

I was one of the few people who kept my job during the pandemic. My wife was working at another restaurant at that time, and she lost her job.

This worried me because we would have just one income for five people in my family. However, I have learned that in difficult circumstances worrying does not help. I learned that from my mom, who is one of the most patient people I know.

Big Changes at Work

At first, business was slow, but it started to improve. Some people were ordering take-out, so my boss decided to stay open. He started a delivery service to increase business. After a few weeks, business got better. Sometimes I looked out the window, and there were many people waiting for their food, all with their masks on. We were surprised but happy to see so many customers. That



A restaurant worker prepares food for take-out. Photo from pexels.com.

gave us hope that we would keep working.

The pandemic changed the way that we worked. Because our business was all take-out, we stopped using dishes and started to use to-go boxes only. Another big change was that we had to wear masks, and we had to keep six feet apart. Wearing a mask is difficult because it gets warm in the kitchen and it is uncomfortable. Even after a year, I am still not used to wearing a mask, but I have no choice.

The Stress of an Open Kitchen

I work in an open kitchen, and this creates another stress for us. That is, customers are always watching. One time, a new customer was watching us closely while we were preparing her food. All of sudden she yelled, “Change your gloves.”

Another one shouted, “You are not keeping 6 feet distance.” (It is difficult to keep 6 feet distance when it is busy, and the work area is small.)

I felt awkward when customers were staring at us, but one benefit of the mask is that we can talk, and customers don’t notice. One time, one

Customers are always watching.

of my coworkers approached me and said, “Don’t look! There is a lady watching us, and she looks angry, so try not to make any mistakes.” We were happy when she left and didn’t say anything because that meant we did a good job.

Don’t Worry—Just Take One Step at a Time

Now, things are better. After six months, my wife is working again, and we are financially stable. Also, at work, customers can dine in safely. Half of the people come for take-out, and the others eat at the restaurant. The restaurant is hiring new people, and we feel safe again.

The pandemic was a challenging experience, but it further proved that I don’t need to worry in difficult times. I need to take one step at a time, be patient, and stay calm. I can trust that God will be by my side even when everything seems to be wrong.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to this article, what are some of the challenges that Edwin has to deal with as a restaurant worker?
2. What is the main strategy he uses to deal with those challenges?
3. Talk to a partner about a time you were worried about something. How did you manage your worry? What strategies worked for you?

Edwin Peña lives in Scarborough, Maine, and is a student at Portland Adult Education in Portland, Maine, working towards his high school diploma. He is married and has three beautiful children. He is from El Salvador and has been in the U.S. for 16 years.



Don’t Worry, Be Happy

Watch this international production of children singing and providing musical back-up to Bobby McFerrin’s “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” Search for it on Youtube or click [here](#) and go directly to the 4-minute video. Produced by Playing for Change.