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## ON THE WORKING CONDITIONS FOR THE BUILDING SERVICE ASSOCIATE

Hey there, it's Josh the Janitor from Curtis East. I feel a moral obligation to inform the Denison community of the toxic and dangerous working environment Building Service Associates (BSA) face day-to-day. Call me a disgruntled employee if you want, but my friends are still on the grind, and they're not being paid their true worth.

There is not a culture of feedback for BSAs, but a culture of fear. Retaliation is a real thing, and I experienced it when I made a manager look bad to their superior. I worked seven days three weeks straight to make ends meet (started at \$11.75/hr, made \$12.88/hr after three years of employment), exhausted myself, used my FMLA, ended up sick with exhaustion (which I thought was COVID), and fell behind in my work. There was no one-on-one conversation with this manager to rectify the problem. Actually, they ignored my email requesting help/suggestions/standards/feedback from each level of management. When the manager came to punish me, they ignored my greeting, gave me the silent treatment, and watched while my immediate supervisor delivered a written warning the manager authored.

Speaking of which, there are no cleanliness standards set by BSA leadership: your janitor invents and improvises on a day-to-day basis, and doesn't even know when the job is done to their leader's standards. There were attempts to establish standards about a year ago through the formation of a "cleaning committee," but the results were impractical checklists. They're impractical in that you must work like you're at Amazon to complete them. Team leads and trainers don't even use them.

I've heard us referred to as the "unskilled labor" by a superior (who admittedly apologized). A professor with administrative duties once described me, my coworkers, and the people of Newark (where most BSAs live) as the "normals," which I assume means people with degrees and tenure living in Granville are the "specials." This made me realize how undervalued we are by our management, the Admins, and other members of the community. See, BSAs are not only janitors: they're movers, event staff, trash truck staff, counselors, repair people, delivery people. There are catches in the job description, so they can literally be put on any job, lifting any weight ("perform other duties as required," "may require assisting with moving and lifting of more than 50 pounds for special events"). This is to save on the cost of actually hiring people who specialize in those skills.

For example, at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, in lieu of paying professionals with the proper equipment to move a vending machine from Shaw's common area, my supervisor pulled me from cleaning, and put me on the job with four others. When we requested an appliance dolly, they brought us a regular one with a flat tire, and reiterated that the job must be done. Once my arm went numb from the lift, I told the crew, "Nah, we're not doing this." Our supervisor (who has since been promoted) was frustrated with us for our refusal.

*Continued on the back...*

In summer 2019, a Denison top dog forgot to inform their contracted moving company that the furniture in Shaw, Beaver, and Sawyer doesn't match. Instead of hiring a crew to fix this, my supervisor/now manager put me and five coworkers on the gig (including two temp workers only making \$10/hr). Literally hundreds of pieces of desks, drawers, dressers and bed frames had to be moved between three elevator-less dorms. When we asked for additional hands, the supervisor sent an employee on doctor's orders not to lift to make sure we didn't take extra breaks. The temperature was 90+ in those buildings.

Sometime around May 30th, 2020, the day they took away our Essential Worker bonus, all BSAs were pulled from cleaning to package and remove all student belongings from the dorms. Originally, a moving crew was to be hired, but this was scrapped to, again, save money on labor. It was a hot early summer, and the folks advanced in their age struggled (at 29, I was one of the youngest). We couldn't socially distance in the narrow hallways and my supervisor did not enforce mask-wearing. Admin and HR got to work from home.

BSAs deserve a living wage, they deserve an Essential Worker bonus, and they deserve these because, according to the director of Risk Management and Environmental Health, Steve Gauger, we have the most dangerous job on campus (I had his PowerPoint until they rescinded my Denison email access). Today, BSAs start out at \$12.50, up a buck from when I started in 2018. We didn't get a raise last year, but plenty of "thanks" and free candy. If the Board of Trustees lording an endowment of a billion bucks can pay the president \$450,000 a year, with a \$50,000 bonus for a successful job, they can pay the BSA who cleaned the president's house last summer a living wage, with a bonus for a successful job. Furthermore, BSAs doing Project work with Project employees should be paid Project wages. Every summer, I'd be working alongside Project employees, doing the work of Project employees, and yet, I was never paid for Project work.

The benefits are also terrible. Right after I got out of a severe mental health crisis, Aetna, their insurance provider, kicked me off my mental health meds at the beginning of this year to save themselves money. I was able to take three classes free, but when I tried to be admitted to the school, I was told to go back to OSU Newark by a person in admissions. "Don't you know this is an expensive school?" they asked.

To be clear, this is not a Director of Facilities Operations Michael Supp problem: he's a good friend, a good dad, a good guy with his hands tied. Nor can I blame all of Admin, as Sarah Gepper was nothing short of the kindest HR peep I've worked with since joining the labor market. I believe the aforementioned conditions are the result of a neoliberal administrative team and board, cutting costs to see their endowment (and salaries) grow.

These points need to be kept in mind while Admin Denison conducts its diversity, equity, and inclusion work (which I was part of for one month, but that's another story). What's diverse, equitable and inclusive about poverty wages, manipulative job descriptions, and an abusive working environment for Denisonians without the privilege of a college degree?

*-Joshua Gingras*



Staff "summer plans" Box
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