

From Dishwasher to Chef

Elder Lopez

My first job in the United States was working in an Italian restaurant. I worked as a dishwasher, washing the pots and pans. I didn't like it, but I figured it was an opportunity to eventually realize my dreams, so I did it.

I remember one Saturday night that was crazy busy. The manager asked me to do something for him, but I didn't speak much English at that time.

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The manager got angry with me because I didn't understand him. I felt so sad and angry, but the experience made me think. I told myself that I was going to try hard to learn English and never give up. I have

always believed that everything happens for a reason, which helped me decide to take that event and make a change.

I found a school where I could study English in the mornings and continue to work at night. It

wasn't easy, but I took the challenge. I always try to work hard and to learn something new every day, so that kept me going. I discovered my passion for cook-

ing and my goal to one day become a restaurant chef, and I was able to make my dream a reality.

I feel proud of myself because I still work in the same restaurant where I started as a dishwasher, but now I am one of the chefs. I am even good friends with the manager who was so angry with me on that Saturday night. Although I like what I do now, I still have a lot of other dreams to realize, which keeps me motivated to continue my education.



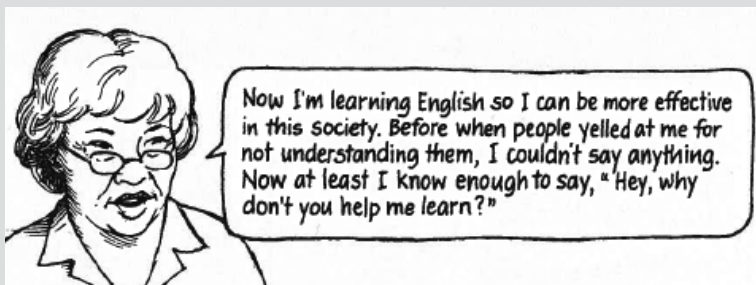
Elder Lopez came to the U.S. from Guatemala when he was 16 years old. He is a student at the Methuen Adult Learning Center in Methuen, MA. He says, "Life is like a camera. Just focus on what's important and capture the good times. Develop from the negative and if things don't work out, just take another shot."

What Would You Do?

Someone yells at you because you don't understand them. What did Elder do when that happened to him? What does the woman in the cartoon do? What can you say or do?

Elder describes a difficult situation that motivated him to make a change. Share a time that happened to you.

What questions do you have about how to move your career forward? Who can you ask?



Source: Problem Posing at Work. Used with permission from Grass Roots Press.