

Jose's New Job

By Jose Estrada (with editing assistance from Bob Hoy)

I wasn't sure what to do. Should I apply for the job or not? I was comfortable in my current job, but I felt I needed a change. The new job would pay a higher wage, but would be much more challenging. It would require a lot of communication in English, and I was afraid I couldn't handle it.

I had been working at Milkco since 2001. Milkco is a plant that produces beverages for Ingles Supermarkets. My job involved driving a forklift to move and sort different brands of milk in the work area. As a Mexican immigrant, I felt lucky to have such a good job. I had done this job for many years, was good at it, and felt comfortable doing it, although it was no longer much of a challenge. It required only a limited ability to speak English.

Several months ago, I saw a job opening posted on the wall in the main hallway. It was for a Relief Operator, which requires the employee to know four different jobs: Filler, Box Maker, Caser/Sealer, and Palletizer.

Filler, the most demanding job, involves running a complex machine to print a label and code date on the plastic jug and then fill the jug with milk or juice. The operator has to program the machine to run the proper type and quantity of beverage. Once the machine has filled a jug, he has to take a sample to the lab to make sure the product is correct. As the machine fills the jugs, he has to check them to make sure they are properly filled and that the label and code date have been printed on the side.

Box Maker, which involves running two machines, one to assemble and glue the box, and the other to stick a label on the side. The operator has to make sure that the machine has a supply of boxes to assemble and that the container is full of glue. If the machine runs out of glue, it can burn out.

Caser/Sealer, which also involves operating two machines, one which drops the jugs into the box and the other which seals the top of the box. The operator has to make sure that the machine has enough glue, the jugs enter the boxes properly, and the boxes are sealed.

Palletizer, which involves operating a machine that stacks filled boxes on pallets and wraps them in plastic. The operator has to program the machine to fill the pallets to four or five levels, and make sure that the pallets are filled and wrapped properly. The job also requires him to move the pallets by forklift to either a cooler or a truck for delivery.

On an ordinary day, I would have to do all four jobs, filling in for other employees when they take their breaks. Or, if an employee took the day off, I would do their job for the entire shift. This job would require a greater ability to speak and understand English than my current job.

After seeing the job posting, I couldn't decide whether to apply. After working at one job for so long, I wondered if I could do four different jobs. The jobs required more communication with

other employees, and I wasn't sure I could handle it. They would also require a lot of training, and I didn't know if my English was good enough to understand the instructions I was given.

After posting a job announcement, management usually waits for about a week to make a selection so people have time to apply. As I thought about the job, I told my wife Teresa about it, and she encouraged me to apply. I waited until the last day of the job posting, then decided to apply. Three days later, my supervisor brought me into his office to tell me that I got the job.

Thanks to my foreman, who has been training me, I have already learned most of what I need to know for my new job. She has taught me the tasks I do in the job and patiently answered my many questions.

My new job is more difficult than my old one, but also more rewarding. I am glad that I made the change. Now I am making more money, and I don't have to work on weekends any more.

One reason I had the confidence to apply for the job was the fact that my English has improved so much in recent years. About 7 years ago, I began working with teachers at the Literacy Council to speak and write English better. At that time, although I had lived in the United States for many years, I wasn't really comfortable speaking in English. Working with Council tutors Bob Hoy and Barbara Demeter, I have improved my English a lot.

