Siga Juozelskis

All of a sudden, the sound of seagull cries began emitting from my co-worker's computer. “You really need to learn to better advocate for yourself and what you want,” he said. A few seconds earlier, he had asked me what type of music I wanted to listen to. Being a relatively new hire in comparison to everyone else in the office, I was still shy and getting to know the office vibe. Eventually, our supervisor told him to shut it off and play something more work appropriate.

I graduated from university in May 2020 in the midst of the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and at a time when many people were losing their jobs. Meanwhile, I was applying to jobs left and right and there seemed to be an endless string of rejection emails in my inbox. Suddenly, I was contacted by a recruiter for a company that was very interested in my resume and invited me to apply. I got the interview and received a job offer on the spot. I took it immediately knowing this kind of opportunity may not present itself for a while due to the pandemic.

After working there for 6 months, I discovered that this was the worst job in the history of all jobs. I began discussing this with my coworkers since they too understood how horrible this place was. I told them I considered applying to grad school to pursue my passion for geology and earth sciences and to get out of the toxicity that was my office. My 28-year-old coworker (I was 22 at the time) then said “Oh don’t even try it, you’re stuck here - once you start at [redacted company name], you’ll never get out. That’s what happened to me.” I was appalled at this. I could tell he was projecting his sad life unto mine, and I knew something had to be done.

A few months later, we hired some fresh faces my age, and I was instantly more comfortable in the office. The newer hires and I became fast friends and I shared with them all the horrible traits of our workplace. Soon after seeing the toxicity in our office for themselves, we all discussed applying to grad school. They were encouraging and supportive of getting out of that purgatory.

I then began doing research on grad schools and quickly realized that it may be too late to apply to many of them. Checking application deadlines, many had already passed or were within the month that I was considering applying. I began contacting professors from all over the United States at multiple schools to see if they had any available positions for the upcoming fall semester but to no avail. Everyone had already chosen their prospective students or weren’t accepting any for that semester. I didn’t lose hope and asked previous professors to write recommendations for my applications.

I ended up applying to only one school whose application deadline was 2 weeks away, while the department I was applying to was in the middle of being possibly cut from the university. Weeks later, I received the rejection email. Suffice to say I was disappointed, but I understood my situation. I applied late, and I was stuck at my job, just like my coworker had told me.

A few days later, I received an email from a professor mentioning that he had a spot open up for a prospective master's student position. He had seen my application and thought I was the most qualified for the position. I was confused since I had received a rejection email, but excited at the idea of getting out of my current position. We met and decided that I would be his new student that upcoming fall.

The next time I walked into work I announced that I had gotten into graduate school, and my coworkers were supportive and excited for me. I walked up to the coworker that felt stuck, and told him “[redacted name], if you want to feel unstuck, make some kind of change. Quit, ask for a promotion, or apply to a different job to pursue what you want to do; it’s up to you to get unstuck”.