

Malek's Career Shift

Malek is in the process of making a career shift from working in a hotel to working in a food services program. After ten years working at a hotel where he worked his way up from the night shift supervisor to general manager, he has just taken on a new position in a food services program. He is to become the day-to-day manager in a program that prepares and sends food out to cafeterias located in industrial complexes. The job is closer to home and pays more but also requires Malek to begin anew after being in the same type of job for a decade. When asked about his persona as a worker, Malek shared the following:

“I can handle all kinds of problems but work best when I have one thing that I can really focus on and think about at a time. I know a lot about how things work.”

“I dread feedback. It is often bad news. If I know feedback is coming, I am anxious and if it is bad, I just want to get away.”

“Because of this, I know how to soften feedback for people who work for me—to help them take it in.”

“I know how to make customers feel heard. I listen well.”

“As a person of color, I often feel overlooked by supervisors.”

Malek's new work context has the following characteristics. It has quiet moments and busy moments. His immediate supervisor is not located at the same facility as Malek. Instead, his supervisor works at a distance and comes to town periodically. Malek's job involves interacting with a diverse staff and supporting younger people coming into the business. Unfortunately, the facility has tended to see a lot of turnover in the newest employees. Issues arise that often need someone to take initiative and approach thoughtfully; there is no immediate supervisor Malek can consult with to guide him in what to do. As Malek reflects upon his new role he realizes that he feels confident about the customer service aspects and the need to be able to solve problems in the moment based upon similarities to the many instances over the past decade.

As far as the food products, because they are perishable, there has to be a responsible person who ultimately handles things. Further, there is a lot to be learned about the science of the various products and how to best maintain them.

The person whose job Malek is taking, Paul, is retiring in a month. Malek was able to pick his starting date so he decided to start sooner to give him some overlap time with the person who knows his job best. In watching his predecessor, he notices times when Paul is abrupt with certain employees. It seems that some of them are the newer employees as well as women who have been at the facility for a long time. At first, Malek found himself wondering why these employees were not able to perform as expected. But one night during some quiet reflection time, he realized the importance of not jumping to conclusions and of trying to consider the various perspectives in each of these situations. Perhaps understanding what each of these employees was trying to say might offer some important information in his own management decisions.

→What do you notice about Malek as far as engaging in the moves of a Fast Fish Learner? What do you notice Malek doing? What other actions related to being a Fast Fish Learner/Worker might you suggest to Malek?