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Pooling (And Fooling) Around

Summer is my favorite time of the year. Not because school is out and the weather is nice, but because my seasonal job as a pool boy can finally begin. Yes, I know this isn't exactly what makes summer exciting for most people. Normally, it would be the anticipation for sweet ice cream melting in your hand on a hot day. Maybe it's all the free time and possible vacations in the coming months. I admit, all of those things definitely played a part in me looking forward to the blistering hot months ahead, but summer was much more to me. For me, it was a way to continue exploring my passion and furthering my literacy in water chemistry and how to operate a pool.

My interest in pool boy-ing and water chemistry in general came as a surprise to even me. Believe it or not, I owe my interest and summer job to the great art of ease-dropping. A week before the season started my best friend and I, who were both already employed as lifeguards, came in to help clean the pools. As we were doing this, I overheard Mike (my future and most important sponsor of literacy) talking to our shift manager. With the pressure washer running and music blasting through the small speaker we brought, it was pure luck that I overheard him mention the opening for the pool boy job. There it was. The opportunity for a whole different path over the summer. I had no clue if I'd like it or if I even really wanted to pursue it. All I knew was the opportunity was there, and whether it be good or bad I wanted to see what this opportunity had in store for me. A few minutes later I went to Mike and expressed my interest in

becoming the pool boy, and he hired me on the spot. I believe this is the beginning of my journey to becoming literate in water chemistry. Yes, I hadn't learned anything yet, but my interest skyrocketed and I had the motivation to now learn as much as possible about my new position.

After a lengthy interview process and background check (not really), I was ready to start my journey to improving my literacy in this area of my life. Before I could get my hands on chemicals and actual pool equipment and become a true pool boy, I had to get my pool operator certification. The organization that I got my certification from, The Aquatic Council LLC., was one of my first sponsors of literacy for learning about water chemistry and operating a pool. The two day class felt like two years with how much fine-detailed information I had to learn. I can still hear the instructor's monotone voice explaining the effects of sunlights on water chemistry and the breakdown of chlorine (that information actually turned out to be very useful). Despite the boringness of the class I was confident I now had a solid understanding of the different parts of a pool and how they work with each other, actual water chemistry, and how to safely handle the chemicals I'd be using.

Now that I was certified, I was ready to tackle my new position head on using the information I learned from the class. That's what I first thought until I started working with Mike. Now Mike isn't your ordinary run-of-the-mill boss. He's in his mid seventies, lives only with his dog, and was originally a Navy Seal for over two decades. This meant he knew what he was doing, and I was gonna be learning directly under him. For the first few weeks everything was trial and error. I was learning about where everything was in the pump rooms, which was a struggle because the pump rooms were extremely loud. It was similar to being front row at a concert, just the constant humming noise of the pumps circulating nearly 500 gallons of water a minute. Mike, with his much greater knowledge and experience, taught me not to be in the pump

rooms for more than 9 minutes or hearing damage can become serious. Next he taught me how to calculate and read water chemistry such as chlorine and pH. This was the most time consuming part of my job, but he intentionally made it so. As time progressed I made less and less mistakes, making the process go by smoother and faster each time. Finally came handling chemicals that we would pour into the water before we opened for the day. With this being the most important but also most dangerous part of my job, he taught me to remain calm when something went wrong, especially when I inhaled the cloud from pouring acid or got chlorine on my skin. Mike started out as my biggest sponsor of literacy, but he ended up being one of my biggest role models that I look up to.

As fun as this summer job sounds, there were still parts of my job that made me reflect on how strong my interest in pool chemistry really was. Unfortunately, there are rules against pouring chemicals into the pool whenever you want, especially if there are people swimming in the water watching you do exactly that. This meant all my work had to be completed in the morning. Early morning. Most days I'd be arriving at the pool in complete darkness before the sun even rose. Doing this every morning this summer was a struggle, and there were days where my head felt glued to my pillow. Waking up early in the mornings was just the tip of the iceberg for my struggling because my work started as soon as I got there. From getting there at 5 in the morning to leaving at noon, I was on my toes (or in the water) the entire time. From pouring acid to fixing pool ladders to adjusting chlorinators, I was constantly moving around. At the time, my mind was stuck on when I could spare just 5 minutes to sit down or eat a snack, but reflecting on that time now I realize I gained so much experience in working that much. I was constantly exposed to every aspect of being a pool boy, which was more than just the work I was doing. After repetitively coming in early, pushing through the tiredness and the heat, and doing

uncomfortable jobs at uncomfortable times, I had not only started to become literate in pool chemistry. I was simultaneously improving my discipline, critical thinking, and attitude towards completing hard tasks.

Working as a pool boy to other people might seem like just another summer job. To me it was so much more. I didn't just become more literate in my job as a pool boy, I became a harder working and more disciplined person. My biggest sponsor of literacy, Mike, not only taught me most of what I know about my job, he also gave me hard tasks that challenged me and, eventually, that I had to overcome. This grew both my literacy, and my character. I know that my passion for my summer job will only increase. Even now, I get the roller coaster feeling in my stomach just thinking about next summer and all the new possibilities each day will bring.

