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The Value in a Dinner Shift

“Hi! Thank you for calling. This is Olivia speaking, how may I help you?”

“Uh, Olivia?”

Oh. It was my coworker. My hour-late coworker. Given that we were fully in rush hour and my coworker most definitely realized, I could only assume the worst in regards to his absence. Was he okay? Did something happen? I cradled the phone to my ear with worry as I watched the reception fill up with guests waiting to be seated.

Instead of my suspicions being confirmed, he transformed my worry into deliberation. He was calling to let me know he just was not in the mood to come in and wanted me to clock in for him. The managers weren't here and nobody would find out, he reasoned. He was right in that sense. I could tell the waiters he was sick and the only person who would really know what was going on would be me. So why did the thought of clocking in for him fill me with so much dread?

He continued to argue that one shift at a restaurant wouldn't affect anyone but all I could think was that simply wasn't true. A shift was six hours of everyone's time. Six hours of continuous standing, bussing tables, carrying pots, and serving guests. Was it worth it to do him this one favor? In all honesty, I did think about it after listening to his reasoning. As I was watching more guests walk through the door and the waiters bustle around the restaurant, though, I knew I



had to hang up. I told my coworker I wouldn't be clocking in for him. That night, my manager asked why my coworker didn't come in and I hesitantly told him the truth.

Months later, the ever insignificant scenario kept a question floating around my mind: Did I do the right thing? The answer: yes. As I reflect back on that night, I think about what my coworkers and I were all working for. College tuition for me, paying rent for a cook, and saving up for a trip for a waiter. All of us had goals to accomplish and were putting in the work to get there. It would have been unfair for my coworker to reap the benefits of others' labor and wrong for me to assist him in doing so.

Ultimately, I am proud of my decision to defend honest work that night. Although it may have only been one dinner shift at a restaurant, it was an honest and right choice to make. As I face increasingly conflicting situations, I vow to make decisions with respect to honesty and integrity. I vow to always be able to look around and see the value of my hard working coworkers' time in anybody's efforts, whether I am in a restaurant, school, or office.