

## Why Did They Let Me Go?

The Lucia Mar School District didn't let me volunteer for Oceano School because of a past criminal background. I had been volunteering for the YMCA's afterschool program at Oceano Elementary School in Oceano, California for about a month. To volunteer for the YMCA I took and cleared a fingerprint background check. With this accomplishment I felt I was one step closer to my goal of possibly being a teacher at Oceano School in the near future. This is my home town and I was a student here myself. So feeling positive about my chances of volunteering at Oceano School I took a fingerprint background check for the Lucia Mar School District and got denied. Not only that but they then notified the YMCA and told them I was unable to volunteer for them as well. I believe this situation can be analyzed through the theories of Max Weber and William Julius Wilson. Max Weber theorized that there is a system of domination that drives society. This is symbolized in the modern bureaucracy where power is expressed from the top down. William Wilson theorized that factors affecting economic opportunities go beyond race. That if people concentrate on race as a factor for missed opportunities they neglect getting together with other groups to deal with economic factors that go beyond race like evolving global and technological changes. I believe Weber's theories about bureaucratic power and status and Wilson's theory about non-racial economic factors both apply to my termination because of the reason I was let go and how it was done, because of the meaning it may have going forward, and because of the options available to me.

Applying Wilson's theory as an analogy to the reason I was let go, I can see Wilson saying, "Most of the new jobs for workers with limited training and education are in the service sector and are disproportionately held by women. This is even truer for those who work in social services, which include the industries of health, education, and welfare" (p. 498). I could look at

my termination as analogous to having limited training and education which would cause me not to get the job. Weber's theory of the bureaucratic machine could be applied to how I was let go. For example, I was informed via a voicemail. This is the bureaucratic machine at work because the decision was made by a superintendent of the school district, but I was informed by his secretary. Weber wrote about this sort of situation in his essay, *The Types of Legitimate Domination* when he stated, "However, normally the rule over a considerable number of persons requires a staff, that is, a special group which can normally be trusted to execute the general policy as well as the specific commands" (p. 88). The secretary was just doing her job and had nothing to do with the decision. However, when I called to talk to someone about this I had to talk to her. And if I wanted to take up the issue further I would have to set up a meeting with the superintendent himself.

Weber's theory about the power of the bureaucratic machine may have a strong effect on what the meaning of my termination may have on me going forward. My reaction to my termination was that I may not be able to become a teacher. The law may be too strong to overcome. I believe this is what the authority figures will use to justify their decision. Weber described three types of authority. One type of authority is based on rational grounds. Rational grounds bases its belief "in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority)" (p. 90). I interpret this statement as meaning that the superintendant that made the decision is supported in his decision by the law. And this also indicates that the decision may not be personal because Weber said, "In the case of legal authority, obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order" (p. 90). Applying Wilson's theory as an analogy, it could be argued that developments that lowered transportation costs in global economic activity encouraged companies to shift work to low-wage areas around

the world thereby leaving American workers without jobs. This analogy could be applied to this situation based on rational grounds. The companies that moved overseas saw it as the only rational thing to do to stay competitive and their decision to do so was upheld by legal authority. It was nothing against the workers and in my case nothing against me.

Weber's theory about status honor may affect my options available to me. What are my options? I could conform to the style of life that will get me the job. I need to build status. Weber alluded to this when he wrote, "status honor is expressed by the fact that above else a specific style of life is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle" (p. 94). I believed I was living up to the type of life expected of a teacher. I was left thinking, "what else do I have to do"? I haven't been in trouble for years. I am excelling in school and I am giving back to the communities of the central coast by volunteering. Wilson would probably say that I need more education and training to get my job. He said, "In the new global economy, highly educated, well-trained men and women are in demand". And he also said, "Substantial numbers of new professional, technical, and managerial positions have been created that primarily benefit those with higher levels of formal education" (p. 497-8). I hope that with a bachelor's degree and further education, I could be in such demand that my past record could be overshadowed by all the positive things I have done and will do. With the elevation of my status, "the road to legal privilege, positive or negative, is easily traveled as soon as a certain stratification of the social order has in fact been "lived in" and has achieved stability by virtue of a stable distribution of economic power" (p. 94).

It could be argued that a weakness of the theories is that I was qualified to volunteer and I should have been accepted because even though I had a past record, it was not related to working with kids. While it may be the case that I was qualified to volunteer, Wilson could refute this

argument by saying that there are plenty of candidates that do not have a past record and thus are essentially more qualified than me. It could be argued that another weakness of the theories is that another type of authority could have been used to give me a chance to volunteer. If the superintendent would have used Weber's authority based on charismatic grounds he may have been able to risk giving me a chance and not catch flack from others because as a charismatic leader his authority "is obeyed by virtue of personal trust in his revelation" (p. 90). While it may be the case that charismatic authority may have been used to allow me to volunteer, there are rules governed by law that volunteers must meet before volunteering and I did not meet those rules. Lastly, it could be argued that a third weakness of the theories is that the things that are required of me to elevate my status are not easily attainable. While it may be the case that it will take a lot of hard work to elevate my status, Weber believes there are privileges of achieving status honor one being the "monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities" (p. 95).

In conclusion, Weber's theories about bureaucratic power and status and Wilson's theory about non-racial economic factors applying to my termination in the reason and the way I was let go, in the meaning it has on my future and on the options available to me have shown me that although it may seem like I have the deck stacked against me, there is room for hope in my situation because I could work on elevating my status and become more in demand to make myself irresistible in the market.