

Operation Get Down

Walter Lucken IV

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When I was 23 I got sent to be the afternoon supervisor of valet parking at the much shittier hotel across the street. This was definitely a promotion, there was a lot less managers around that hotel at night and it was a lot smaller so I figured I could get busy without anybody in my business as long as I kept the complaints and accidents and shit to a minimum. Child's play really, I was making way more cash and on top of that I got a substantial bump to my hourly. My shift was 3pm to 11pm, so I mostly got up around noon every day and then when I got off work I would sit in my apartment smoking cigarettes in the dark, watching the cars go down Cass Avenue. It was the best feeling in the world to know that nobody really knew where I was or what I was doing, and that for the people in the cars going by I was a tiny piece of the landscape, so in a way we were connected. I played a lot of Coltrane that winter, to this day I still know what's gonna happen next throughout all of Ascension and A Love Supreme.

The only problem was the guys I was supervising. Now in hotel valet parking there is a pretty clear division of who is supposed to do what jobs and collect what money. Before I came over there had been no supervisor, so the guys had pretty much been doing whatever and collected whatever cash tips they pleased. I guess from their perspective when I showed up they felt their pockets getting lighter cause I let em know what roles were for me and what roles were for them. I also imposed such draconian rules as "wear your full work uniform at work" and "eat lunch where you are supposed to eat lunch". I even went so far as to write them up for blowing off work without calling. This is all to say that there was no love lost between me and them that winter, they constantly talked shit to me and complained about me to the general manager, thinking I would either quit or get fired because there were 7 of them and one of me. That wasn't gonna happen, let me tell you why.

Shit is probably different now but at the time most of the valet guys lived with their parents and went to school on top of the job. That means that they didn't have 100% availability and didn't really need the money to survive. Me on the other hand, I had my own place and nothing to do at any time besides go to work, which the general manager knew cause I always came in early and stayed late when I was asked to. I worked extra days too. This made me much more valuable to the company than any one of them or even all of them together.

At the time I took the situation personally I already had a degree which you know hadn't did shit for me since I graduated because I was a valet captain at a hotel, not working at some nonprofit or whatever like I planned. So for me, them crying about me trying to make money and do my job when they lived with their parents was a fuck you cause if I lost that job I felt like I was gonna go back to missing meals and shit. Not happening. I definitely said a lot of shit to those kids I'm not proud of and handled a lot of situations in ways I wouldn't today, but you gotta understand when you're all alone trying to make it in the city and some 19 year old who gets taken care of at home is trying to cut into you about having to be to work when he's supposed to, it doesn't bring the best out of you.

Anyway that was the same winter that the city got the first "polar vortex" and you know we still went to work through that whole shit. One night in particular it was negative 5 or some shit outside with snow piled 2 or 3 feet high. Pitch black with barely any cars on the road, just plow trucks. All the cab drivers had gone home hours ago and at the hotel we had barely any check ins. This was a weeknight too so it was already slow cause of that. I was up front in the valet booth with two valet guys working. Now at this time the hotel had a shuttle which was just a van that would take guests wherever they wanted within a 3 mile radius from the hotel between the hours of 8am and 10pm. Unless of course you were paying some real money, in which case the van went wherever whenever. People staying in the hotel really liked it cause they didn't have to mess around with parking, could have some drinks, etc. That night we would really push the shuttle to its limits.

Like I was saying this was one of those nights that was so cold all you saw moving was the steam from the sewer. Every other animal besides us knows to get inside and stay there when it's that cold. I had spent most of my shift in the valet booth reading, punctuated with the occasional trip out back to smoke a cigarette with the cooks from the hotel bar. Wasn't really making any money but I still had the clock goin. Interestingly enough, slow nights like this was when me and the guys got along best, so we hadn't got into it or anything that night. I got a cheeseburger from the hotel bar for my "lunch" and about halfway through it one of the guys came in, we'll call him Mo.

Mo told me a homeless dude was outside asking if we could take him to a warming center in the hotel van, saying he had some money and was down to pay. My initial answer was something to the effect of "fuck no", and to tell the guy that if he was down to pay he should take a taxi over there. You'll remember that all the cab drivers had gone home that night but that didn't even occur to me cause at that time I wasn't really in the habit of thinking too deeply about other people's problems. Two seconds later Mo comes back in saying just that, the guy said there weren't any cabs. Alright, guess it was time to talk to dude myself.

I step out and the old guy's talking about how he's down to pay the 10 dollars or whatever if we can just hook him up this that and the third woo woo. Now remember it's negative 5 out so if this dude doesn't get to the warming center it might be over for him, so at this point I'm starting to warm up to the idea of looking out. I ask where the warming center is and he reads me off an address that my phone tells me is in the general

vicinity of I-94 and Chene. If you know Detroit you know that that's far as fuck from downtown and way out of the shuttle radius. It then occurs to me that he prolly is asking us and not a cab because that would not only be way more than ten bucks in a cab but cab drivers wouldn't even go there if you had the full fare. So I counter with the proposal that we just take him to the warming center on Jefferson which is 5 minutes away, to which he replies that the warming centers downtown usually get so packed in the winter that they start turning people away cause the fire marshall will get on em about capacity and shit like that. On top of that, dude says that he talked on the phone with the people at this particular warming center and they said that they could guarantee him a spot cause it was so far out and thus harder to get to. I asked why the people who ran the warming center didn't have any transportation to come get him, to which he replied that they do but they focus on picking people up out there on the east side cause they figure people downtown can just walk to the downtown warming center. Mo's like "but all the warming centers downtown are full" and the old guy says "you see what I'm saying man I'm out here fucked up". It was now very clear that we were gonna be giving this dude a ride, even though the place is way out of the shuttle's radius, which means that the commercial insurance technically doesn't apply if anything happens.

I forget how I decided this but the plan was that Mo was gonna take the guy to the warming center and me and the other valet guy, who we'll call Shawn, would stay behind. From the hotel to where the warming center was is a 15 minute drive under normal circumstances, which would put the round trip at about 40 minutes assuming it takes a minute for the dude to get in there and get set up. Remember though, we had feet of snow all over the place with more coming down, so really it was anyone's guess how long it was gonna take. Since it was a slow night at the hotel and nobody had called for the shuttle in a while we figured we had the time to spare. Prolly half an hour after Mo leaves I call him to check in and he's like "man I can't find this place, there's no street signs and the dude just keeps yelling the address at me". I try to figure out where Mo is on my GPS to try and give him directions but that part of the city is mostly industrial so it's not like there's any landmarks or anything. This was the first sign that shit was gonna go sideways that night. Mo says he's gonna pull over and put the address in his GPS again and see what he can figure out. Turns out the old guy actually had the wrong address in the first place which I guess we should have double checked before Mo left. I hit a cigarette to calm my nerves, figuring our problems were over.

Wrong. 15 minutes later Mo calls to inform me that he got the van stuck in the snow. To refresh, he got the hotel's van stuck in snow way out at Chene and 94 trying to give a guy who is experiencing homelessness a ride to a warming center. Now if you're reading this you're like what's the big deal you guys were doing a good deed, unless you have worked in a hotel in downtown Detroit, in which case you're familiar with their posture towards downtown's more under-resourced residents. Namely, a big FUCK YOU. So we either gotta get this shit figured out or we are all gonna be mega fired. On top of that somehow people are now calling the shuttle to get picked up from wherever they're at all of a sudden and we got a couple cars up front that Shawn is running back and forth parking himself. We are in a jam like shit. I tell Mo to get the shovel out the back and do his best to try and dig the van out, he's talking about some call a tow truck and I'm like dawg that's gonna cost like hundreds of dollars and we are fucked if we gotta explain why the van is there in the

first place, this one's on us to figure out. Shawn comes back and suggests that he should go out there and help dig the van out. This risks Shawn getting stuck or lost himself but let him tell it he is "just too bad for that" so fuck it he's on his way to bail Mo and the old guy out and I'm up front alone.

Cars keep pulling up and people keep blowing up the valet booth phone asking when the shuttle is gonna come get them. At this point people are hitting up the front desk and bitching them out too so now I got the front desk people on my ass coming in the valet booth asking me why the shuttle is so busy and there's so many cars out front when the hotel has like 14 checks in that day. I'm making up all kinds of bullshit about how Mo is just driving safe for the weather conditions and how he keeps getting calls from people asking to be taken from one place to another instead of coming back to the hotel, which is why he hasn't been back in like an hour. At one point I make up some sort of story about a woman who's terminally ill and needed to be taken to CVS from the Karmanos Cancer Center to get a hairbrush or something. That shit was bold but desperate times, I guess.

20-30 minutes pass and I just know at any moment the desk is gonna call the general manager of the valet parking company and my goose is gonna be cooked real good. It's all bad. Next thing I know Shawn calls me on some "you sent a boy to do a man's job my dawg, Mo didn't even know to turn off the traction control on the van. We got unc together and we're on the way back now". Thank fuckin god. I exhale the biggest sigh of relief in history and get back to parking the last few cars. Running back and forth on my bum knee in the cold isn't fun but at least I can avoid the front desk people who are now all the way furious with me, cause they are definitely all gonna get written up at this point. Even though we are different wings of the hotel (and the valet parking is ran by a third party company) they can only get so many complaints about us until it starts to fuck up their "guest experience rating" or whatever so I already know that some kinda problem is coming my way when my boss gets his weekly email from the hotel.

The question is whether I'll be able to play it off as a weird night or if he's gonna catch wind of the fact that we were doing good deeds with the hotel van, which is gonna get me canned no question. Things are looking promising, Shawn pulls back up about 20 minutes later, explaining that Mo was about to run out of gas and had to stop and put some in. By now the people who had been incessantly calling the shuttle phone have all taken cabs back, cabs they had to wait an hour for that overcharged them, which means the cabs overcharged me in the end cause I'm reimbursing the guests out of their pocket to keep them from complaining. I'll never forget the way this one lady hissed "SEVEN....DOLLARS" at me when I asked how much her cab was. Like god damn he could have charged her a flat ten, what was she gonna do, walk?

The remaining two hours of the shift was spent in total silence, all 3 of us huddled in the valet booth trying to avoid eye contact with the front desk who were definitely gonna drop all kinds of emails on us trying to get us fired or moved, me especially. I knew that wasn't gonna happen cause we were already the guys who had been transferred from other, nicer hotels, so there wasn't anywhere shittier to send us. Sometimes it

pays to fuck up. On top of that my boss wasn't in the habit of firing anyone unless they fucked with his money or did something extremely egregiously against the rules such as going on Good Samaritan missions in the hotel van. As long as he didn't catch wind of what really happened, next week it would be like nothing ever happened.

Now as soon as I came in next week the valet guys, Shawn and Mo included, started telling me that "Operation Get Down" had become "Operation Get Walt Fired", and that they were going to add to their usual weekly complaints about me that I "made them drive a homeless person to a warming place in dangerous weather because he gave me ten dollars". I did not in fact collect ten dollars from the old guy, at the time Mo said he didn't either cause it was against his religion to accept payment for helping a person in need. Nonetheless I figured I was fucked cause it was way too specific of a story to be made up and even if they did get fired themselves, they could just go get some job at laser tag or whatever meanwhile I was about to be out on my ass. They might just be childish enough to do it, even though I had let them slide on a couple things since the night in question just to say thanks. However, for reasons I noted earlier, they all got fired one by one through the rest of that winter, leaving me with a fresh crew of guys by spring who didn't have any reason to feel like I was in their pockets. I worked there for like 3 more years after that.

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