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THE SERVICE WORKER

“Maruichi Providence Lies to Workers About Wages”



Maruichi Food & Deli in Providence is the most recent expansion in the Fuji Mart Corp chain. Starting as the singular store of Fuji Mart in Greenwich Connecticut, in 2013 after being acquired by a new owner it began its growth into a chain. Currently there are 7 other stores associated with Fuji Mart Corp in the Northeast, primarily Massachusetts and Connecticut. Like the other stores in this chain, Maruichi in Providence prides itself on offering specialty Japanese foods. The store itself is made up of a cafe and a grocery, with the kitchen making both made-to-order foods and prepared sushi, and the grocery offering the typical boutique experience with high-end imported products. However, under the cute appearance of the store, there are a number of issues that cause staff to be overworked and given unnecessary stress.

This location of Maruichi currently has no store manager, with practically all aspects of the location being under control of the regional manager. The regional manager spends most of his working time at other stores, despite the Providence location being the one to most recently open. Since opening, the location has been left understaffed and with no clear directions on how to handle the day-to-day maintenance of the store.

Being chronically understaffed in a place of work is practically standard for food service workers as bosses prioritize profits over the conditions of the store. Despite the success of other store locations, and growing popularity of the Providence location, management makes claims that they cannot afford the baseline

amount of staff needed to run the store. While putting together expensive promotional campaigns and advertising fancy imported foods, they fail to do the simple task of filling necessary positions such as dishwashers. With a store open 7 days a week, 10am-9pm, there is only one officially designated dishwasher, which of course means that kitchen staff often have to stop what they're doing during a rush in order to wash dishes.

With no store manager, the heads of each department (kitchen, cafe, and grocery) all hold a position of equal, insufficient, authority. No one person is in charge of placing orders, each department orders for itself; however, some supplies are used between multiple departments, meaning the confusion over who orders what can cause supplies to run out. There are no lines of communication set up between each department, and when things go wrong that affect the entire store the only one who can fix the problem is the regional manager. The same problem occurs when the leads of departments have not been instructed on how to handle various situations, which is a fairly common issue as the regional manager tends to put off and forget to teach basic tasks. All of this confusion is exacerbated by the fact that the head of cafe recently left, meaning even more processes of the store are in limbo until the regional manager decides how to move forward.

Besides no manager, not enough dishwashers, and generally not enough staff on busy days, the company lacks an HR department; which has of course already become an issue in the few months

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the store has been open. When there was an issue of one 23 year old employee creeping on a few of the 17/18 year old female colleagues, an ex-employee who first brought the issue up to management was told, “we care about safety, but we care more that everyone is working.” While the offending employee was fired, it was only after one member of kitchen staff took it upon themselves to meet with and collect written statements from multiple of the women employees. In addition to this, a number of women have quit over issues of feeling unsafe. One ex-employee reported to have been whistled at when passing through the kitchen; in response she asked the regional manager to have a talk with the men in the kitchen and remind them to be respectful of the women in the workplace, but instead she was told to, “give them the benefit of the doubt” because they were speaking spanish so she couldn’t know for certain that she was being harassed.

Of course, no service job would be complete without shit pay, but the conditions at Maruichi are particularly egregious. The front of kitchen staff are paid only \$17/\$18 dollars an hour; however, cafe staff bear the brunt of this issue. While during the hiring process they were told \$15 an hour plus tips, the regional manager claimed that was a “miscommunication” with the owner, and that cafe would actually be receiving \$6.75 an hour due to the loophole around tipped wages in the US. While \$6.75 would be bad wages for any service position, it is exaggerated here because cafe staff are not specifically waiting on tables, meaning customers almost never feel

obligated to tip 20%. There will be long rushes where cafe will end up with only a few dollars in tips- a normal thing to expect with a normal barista pay, but with only \$6.75 an hour before tips cafe staff almost never see a dime over the \$15 an hour they were promised.

It’s clear that this Fuji Mart Corp does not care about their workers. Instead, they run the store and those who operate it into the ground in pursuit of profit, as much and as fast as possible. But that doesn’t mean it is impossible to make things better; because it is labor that generates profit for the store, workers have the ability to use that labor power as leverage to win demands from the company. Like most companies, Maruichi relies on the workers to take a passive stance on how they are treated, but united, invested employees can fight against these conditions.

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