

Interviewer: Awesome. Thank you so much. So can you tell me about how you found your work with Amazon?

Interviewee: I actually have a friend that I used some buy skincare- [dog name], you stop. My dog wants to talk to you. I was texting back and forth with her about a year ago and she told me she was out delivering and I'm like, "What? You work for the state." She mentioned what she was doing, she was doing a Whole Foods delivery at that time. She has all kinds of little side gigs as well. That was the first time I'd even heard of it. I was like, "Well what is that? How do I find that at it?" And she told me and I didn't really pursue it at that time, but that's exactly how I found that. I'd never heard the first thing about it until I talked to her.

Interviewer: Oh cool. What made you decide to apply for the job?

Interviewee: My son's getting ready to turn 16 the end of this month, right before Christmas. Money. [dog] stop. I've had a lot of pet-related veterinary expenses since the first of the year. Massive stuff. I'm a student as well and- [dog], good God.

My boyfriend has been kind enough to support me through my educational endeavors and everything else and he buys my eyeliner. I felt like, "Well, let me check this out and see what I can do with this to help contribute."

Interviewer: Yeah. How long have you been working for Amazon?

Interviewee: I'd say going on four months. Like hardcore.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah? Does that mean you go every day or what does hardcore mean?

Interviewee: It means I pick up as much as I possibly can.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you have a shift today?

Interviewee: I do.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah? What time are you going?

Interviewee: It's starts at 4:30, which means I leave my house about 3:30. [dog], stop.

Interviewer: Then you go to the warehouse and what happens?

Interviewee: It varies. They tell you some stuff up. You go in and usually you get in, they have lines designated for the vans. The DFC vans, and then for the drivers with their own vehicles, if they're really backed up from the previous shift loading out, they may hold you and the line will go way out in the road. Which has only happened to me one time. You get in line basically and you could check in 15 minutes before your shift starts, which is a brilliant thing to do because if you have a problem with a package, the app, anything,

and you don't start delivering at the time you're scheduled to, your marked as late unless you get it cleared up before you leave the warehouse.

I always get there in plenty of time to get this stuff done or so I think. It doesn't always work out that way. There have been issues, many issues-

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. I'm sure.

Interviewee: I have to allow for traffic, construction, everything. Depending on what I use, I'm about 36 miles, I mean 36 minutes from the warehouse. Yeah. I drive like a bat out of hell. That's just nutty. If I'm alone in the vehicle, I drive like Ricky Bobby in Talladega Nights.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a great image. Thank you. I now understand.

Interviewee: Wait for it. I'm [age] and I'm an old rocker chick with [identifiers] and black finger nails. Picture it now.

Interviewer: It's fabulous. I love it. When you get there and you check in, do you have to scan in the packages or what actually happens?

Interviewee: [dog], my God. You show them your driver's license and they scan that to come in and they usually have racks with packages and the zipper bin things. Fabric ones? Just lined up.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They just hand them out randomly.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: Typically, what I've seen is when you go all the shifts, everybody that's showing up at that time has the same length of shift, like three hours or two hours or two and a half hours. All of those racks are designed for that type of shift.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Okay. Now one of them can have 5 million things on it and one of them can have one little zipper bin. It's all off the route and whatever their algorithms are and how they set it up. Then they just give you a rack. There's a paper with a QR code on the rack, then you scan that and it loads your itinerary at that time. Then you take the rack to your vehicle in whatever the weather is outside. You scan each individual package with your phone because you go through the app on your phone and you load your car and there's a method to loading their car. They don't tell you any of that. The only way you find any of that out is through Facebook group pretty much.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Did you post and ask for advice?

Interviewee: The training videos are crap.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah? What do they cover and what did you have to figure out on your own?

Interviewee: The coding on the labels. Everything on that label is a code.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: You shut up. They have yellow stickers or pink stickers or whatever. I'm looking at a package I got, it's got a yellow sticker and it's got letters and numbers. All of those are going to go in the same area. The logistics stuff is harder to sort than like Prime Now or Whole Foods. They use a random word and it's really big and black and you just put them all together and you go.

Interviewer: Did you learn that-

Interviewee: Logistics is just a little bit harder.

Interviewer: Did you learn that from posting in the group and people advising you on what to do?

Interviewee: YouTube.

Interviewer: YouTube. Oh, cool.

Interviewee: Yeah. Trial and error. Yeah. The first time I delivered, my boyfriend and the dog went with me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I would've quit after the third delivery if they hadn't been with me. In my area, it's difficult to get Prime Now and Whole Foods, right now. Which everybody's complaining about lack of blocks right now anyway. That's true. It has gotten kind of weird. I just took something to try and it was a logistics and that was what kept coming up and I was like, "Well screw it. I'll keep trying." I've been down dirt roads. I have been four miles up the dirt roads, the private property. I had been places that I didn't know existed. [dog name]. I'm going to take you and drop you off there. No, I'm not. I'm kidding.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: Basically trial and error and trying to decipher how some people in the group tell you to do stuff. YouTube is far more informative. There's one or two out there, but it starts to make sense after a minute. It's not rocket science, but until you look at it and look at the label, look at all of it. You don't really connect that. You're hands on.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is the YouTube content made by like a few specific people or does Amazon make it?

Interviewee: It's just random people

Interviewer: Yeah. That's nice that they did it.

Interviewee: There's a couple people on that Facebook groups that do their own stuff while they're driving but they're more about, "Hey, you all don't grab blogs right away and the rates will go up." That's mostly what I've seen out of those.

Interviewer: Oh. Are they encouraging people to wait and so that becomes like a higher demand.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting. Has that worked? Have you seen it work?

Interviewee: I have seen rates- [dog name], God bless it. Stop. He hates not being the center of attention. I'm sorry, I didn't consider that.

Interviewer: That's okay.

Interviewee: I've seen some rates fluctuate. They go up and then they dropped back down and then they go up again. Typically, I'll see it because I'm looking for stuff, but they don't come up like that in time for me to get to them unless it's a Prime Now right down the road from where I live. I live like maybe, if there's no traffic, I can be there in five minutes. If there's a traffic, no cops, I'd be there in five minutes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: That doesn't happen very often with the Prime Now. I have seen it. I've seen them go up and down and up and down. So a lot of the people that have been driving for a while are like "Just wait." Unless you're sitting right outside the place, which people do, you can't really afford to wait.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: That's just my feeling on it. I have to schedule ahead of time. I have to schedule to get the car that I want to drive for this because I use the car my boyfriend drives most days. He works right down the road. We trade off. He comes home late in the afternoon for lunch and he'll leave that car and take another one because it's the [car]. Yeah. I can use the electric for a lot of the delivery part of it. I'll use the gas on the highway to get to the warehouse. I don't have that luxury of doing some of those people are doing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense. You can mention this before, but do you end up working every day?

Interviewee: Most days. I have done several days in a row and as I mentioned- [dog name], shut up. I'm [age], my body can't take it. I don't do well two days in a row. I will do it. I'm doing it next. Wait, I'm doing it today and tomorrow. I have like a four or five hour shift. That's

because it was available and I took what was available, but I could have when I started, but until I really got into it. I didn't know whether I wanted to do it like that, but with school, and my old broken self, it's very difficult on me and right now the blocks are not there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. How far in advance can you sign up for a block?

Interviewee: I have pick-up two for next week recently. One of them popped up at 1:30 this morning as a reserve for a Whole Food and then the other one was just a random thing for X week, a logistics thing that popped up and I took it. I would imagine from everything that I've read that we're going to start thinking in advance with starting in the next few days for the holidays.

Interviewer: That's gearing up now? The black Friday stuff and everything else.

Interviewee: I heard that it should be, I didn't seen anything but I've heard that it should be. I also learned something today. They base some of the stuff that you are offered on your vehicle. One of the videos that I saw from one of the drivers out of my area, he said that people with the larger vehicles will start seeing more blocks because of the holidays and Black Friday and the blocks are designed for those people. I'm like, "Well shoot, I didn't know that."

Interviewer: Secret information here.

Interviewee: They don't tell you.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm sure. Do you feel like the community of other drivers has been pretty supportive of each other or is it really competitive?

Interviewee: I have met some of the biggest assholes on the face of the planet. I think it's supportive online because you're not face to face. Face to face. Not supportive except for one or two people that I've met and you get a lot of the people that are cheating uses bots and script and you can spot that. You know who they are after two or three times doing it. They're the ones that are just totally taking all the good blocks that come.

Interviewer: How did they do it? They have like a bot that signs up as soon as soon as the block's listed? That kind of thing.

Interviewee: Yeah. They snatch them up and there's even companies. You can go on Facebook and it's called Amazon Flex Block Extractor. People sign up for this stuff and pay money to get these. Basically in my area they call it the Bot Cartel or the Script Cartel. We got a lot of people out of that have come in from out of [state] that are part of it. You can spot them a mile away. You know exactly who they are. It's not fair to the rest of us, but it is what it is. My boyfriend's like, "I could write you a script." He said, "I could lock all the rest of them out." That's the kind of work that he does and he makes a shit ton of money doing it. I'm not doing that. That's not right. That's not how it was designed to be.

I don't know. I don't know how many people have complained to Facebook at this point about some of the stuff out there, but they don't care. why would they care?

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Let me see. You've mentioned a couple of different skills, especially with sort of managing the packages and figuring out a strategy for it, but do you feel like there were other skills you've developed along the way to do this job?

Interviewee: I have got really good at kissing butt. Though I have honed my getting what I want skills. People I see toast all the time about, "Well they wouldn't do this for me or this happened and blah blah blah." I get those people at the warehouse to do what I want. I don't know if it's because I know who to play dumb with and I know who to just give the look to. The warehouse people for the most part are children. I'm not saying that in a bad way. I mean, I know you're a lot younger than I am. More than likely, but some of these people look like they're my son's age, but I know they're probably a little bit older and they are power tripping like crazy.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah?

Interviewee: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Is it because they make the assignments of who gets what? That kind of thing.

Interviewee: They kind of do, but they don't make the routes or any of that there from what I've read or heard. They think that because they can go in and mark you on time when you're late or if you're leaving late or whatever. They just got that little bit of power that they all seem to think is the greatest thing in the world. They enjoy it. They really do enjoy it for the most part. There's a couple of them that are super nice and there's a couple people that I would run over if I were given the opportunity.

Interviewer: Okay. This is more about the app that you use for flex. Have you had to test any new software or features for it?

Interviewee: Have I had to what?

Interviewer: Have you ever had to test any new features, software or anything on the app?

Interviewee: Test as in before I use it?

Interviewer: Yu know how sometimes there'll be like, "Oh, do you want to test a new-"

Interviewee: Oh, like a beta thing?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: No, they don't do that at all, that I've seen.

Interviewer: Okay. Has the app changed at all in any sort of major ways since you've been using it?

Interviewee: They're always doing admin stuff to it. They added the safety helpline thing. They added the filters.

Interviewer: Yeah. What are the filters and the safety thing?

Interviewee: The filters. You can pick which stations you want to get block notices from like Prime Now, but they're all geared to the area that you're registered in. Okay. I'm in [city], [state]. A logistics warehouse station is in [city 2], which is basically a suburb. Prime now is right down the street. Whole foods or all the Whole Foods that do delivery in my area, which includes [inaudible 00:22:40] [city 3], which I will not go to. No. I'm not doing that just to deliver groceries. That's just too far. You get those and you can pick which ones you want. Out of six, I have five. If you don't pick anything, you get all of them or [inaudible 00:23:01]. They're getting ready to open another warehouse like southeast of me next year. That'll add to it.

The safety helpline thing is basically when you go in your menu, which it's a pretty basic app. It's nothing fancy at all. You have your time dot and your offers, your calendar, help, earning, that kind of thing. There's a big red button at the bottom and we get emails. I think I got it yesterday, that basically says, if you think you're in danger you can press that button and it gives you the options to dial nine one one or to call some Amazon person, whatever. I don't know. I have OnStar and I'm not going to be calling Amazon to help me. I'm going to be calling nine one one, but I haven't had that situation anyway.

That's the result of the guy getting shot [different state].

Interviewer: Wow. Yeah. I forgot to ask if something goes wrong. Do you have a manager or somebody that you can talk to?

Interviewee: You can call support and I saw some girl posts earlier about how she had called Amazon and couldn't get anybody on the phone, which is completely ridiculous. There's no way that she called and didn't get somebody. You have so many options to reach support and if you're really nice, you sometimes get a number that other people don't get. What happens is you do call support on the app and they call, and I'm always using the Bluetooth, and you get a recording for a second and then somebody comes on the phone and if they can't help you, they'll transfer you to someone else. I've also gotten warehouse manager numbers occasionally when there's been an issue with what was going on before I left. She give me like her cell phone or he'd give me his cell phone number, so if there was a problem while I was out on the road, I could call them directly.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: There's never an issue with reaching somebody? Ever. If they're not helpful, which I've had them not be helpful, I'll ask for someone else or else I'll just be like, "Okay, hang up. Call back."

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. I have a couple last questions. Sorry, that it's a little more than 20 minutes. Do you think of yourself as someone who's an employee of Amazon or are you kind of like a freelancer, self-employed contractor? How would you describe yourself?

Interviewee: I am totally my own boss. That's what I tell people. I said, "You don't work for Amazon. You're your boss. You want to work, work. If you don't want to work, don't work." You make what it is. I have a crate that is just flex stuff. I had my rain coat. I have extra batteries for my flashlight. I have all that stuff. If I'm going somewhere, I've tossed that in my car in case I pick up something while I'm out. If I decide I want [name], that's just me. I'm my own boss. Amazon does not control me.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you think you'll still be doing this in a couple of years?

Interviewee: I'm already looking at a different vehicle because I actually like it. I don't know why I like it. I mean if you're not doing a good job, if you're late all the time, they're going to just let you go. They're going to be like, "Yeah we don't need you," but I guess it's because you don't really have to think about it. You just pull up, drop the package off. I don't know. I feel like I probably will.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: We'll say.

Interviewer: Okay. My last few questions are about the future of work. How do you feel about self driving cars?

Interviewee: I am not thinking those are cool. Right now I don't like the whole idea. Out of control. I'm not a good passenger. We talk about that kind of stuff all the time because at our age we've seen all of the technology. We've seen it all come, in our lifetime everything has happened, just about. I don't know right now. I don't like the idea. I don't want to be on the road with one. It's like being on the road with a drunk driver or somebody who's sleepy. You don't know what's going to happen.

Interviewer: Yeah. Could you imagine Amazon introducing self driving cars into their fleet?

Interviewee: If it will sack them money? Yes. Absolutely.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Interviewee: That's what it's all about. It's the money.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. We got through all my questions. I'm going to stop the recording.