

Interviewer: All right. So, how did you find your job with Amazon?

Interviewee: I saw something about it online and followed up from there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Was it through like a job board or did you find it on the Amazon website itself?

Interviewee: You know, this is going to sound strange. I can't really remember.

Interviewer: Well that's okay.

Interviewee: I don't think it was through a job board, because I wasn't really looking, really looking for a job.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I may have seen it on like, something about it on Facebook or, I'm kind of an avid news junkie, so I may have been reading something online.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I honestly, don't really remember other than it was something online and it was like, "Oh, well I'll click the link and find out more."

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you remember how you applied or what did you have to do to apply?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. It was just filling out the online application on amazon.flex.com.

Interviewer: Oh, so you did it on the website directly?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And then, did you have to download the app after you were approved or when did you download the app?

Interviewee: Right. You know, I think the way they do that is, and I think it's still kind of the same. When you go to that web page, I think you answer about two or three really basic questions and then it proceeds to tell you download the app. And then I think a lot of the more than detailed information you kind of fill in, browse through the app and you watch videos about training, things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you remember what they covered in the training videos?

Interviewee: Some safety things, but a lot of just the process of what to expect when you go to a new, different types of deliveries, whether they're logistics or food or groceries and things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. How long have you had this job?

Interviewee: Right about one year.

Interviewer: Oh, cool. So you've gone through a black Friday rush before?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What was it like?

Interviewee: It was busy last year. It was also very profitable.

Interviewer: Oh yeah?

Interviewee: So, we all enjoyed it and a lot of us drivers are hoping it will be as good this year, we hope.

Interviewer: Yeah. How many blocks do you end up taking during the holiday season?

Interviewee: A lot. Not always 40 hours, but I do this I would definitely say full time. So, depending on the length of the block, but I do typically do more than one block in a day.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, that's what you do during the holiday season or year round?

Interviewee: I do it year round.

Interviewer: Okay. And with the holiday one, do you end up working more than 40 hours?

Interviewee: I'm really trying to look back and remember if we did or not, because I know currently we're capped at 40 hours.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Interviewee: There are times when I hit 40 hours and I can't see any more offers. I've heard rumors that right around the holidays they might lift that cap.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: But, I definitely have done work almost every day.

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

Interviewee: Well now, in terms of signing up for them, we are offered, it varies a little bit, but what they call reserve blocks that are sent to us. Typically on the weekend, and therefore, kind of book you for the week.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Interviewee: So, I get some of those. There's been times when they have a time during the day or middle of the night or something when they, we call it drop the blocks, you know, for the next day and you'll see them then. And then there's times when, myself, when I'll, if the work is steady enough, when I'll wait until closer to the pickup time to see if the price will surge and go up.

Interviewer: Yeah. Does that happen pretty often?

Interviewee: In my area it has, typically it's been happening a lot more often than not I would say. I think I'm in a very good market.

Interviewer: Yeah. How much is it normally an hour that you are in on a trip?

Interviewee: It does vary, but in my area in [city], [state] as a general rule, it has, the prices have urged to \$21.50 or \$23 an hour. And that's typically where I would be.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you end up taking trips when it's less than that?

Interviewee: I'm sorry, say that again?

Interviewer: Do you still end up taking trips when it's less than that?

Interviewee: I do sometimes. It's not always consistent, which is one of the drawbacks of this work I guess, but there are times when it seems like it's slow and you just kind of take what you can get, you know? But, a lot of times I will say, you know, if I don't really feel like I have to work, I might say, "Well, you know, I'm just going to, if the price doesn't surge today, then I just won't work, I'll do something else with my time."

Interviewer: Yeah. And, and if something goes wrong, do you have like a manager or somebody that you can talk to?

Interviewee: I guess it would depend on what the something going wrong would be. I don't have a lot of confidence that I have anybody to talk to that that is empowered to do anything about anything.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: You tend to just, I always, I have the saying I tell people. I say, "You know, Amazon's not really, there's not a lot of people involved and you get the feeling that it's just run by an AI robot." There's no live person to go, "Wait a minute, this doesn't make sense." You know?

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Do you feel like you've had to develop new kinds of skills or strategies to do the work?

Interviewee: Definitely, definitely.

Interviewer: Like what?

Interviewee: This really has kind of changed my, the way that I drive. Even personally, because you have to multitask so much. And, I think this is one of the dangerous parts, is you have to be able to look at the phone and think yourself at the same time and drive safely. And it can be a challenge, it really can be.

Interviewer: Yeah. And then, when you pick up the packages, do you end up following the order that Amazon lays out for you or how do you decide what route you'll do?

Interviewee: Most of the time I do follow the order, but there are times when I don't, I will do it in the opposite order. Basically, if the way I'm doing it, I want my last stop to be close to home or sometimes I will have it where my last stop is near where my daughter lives. So, I'll say, "Well, when I get done I'll stop by and visit my daughter and my grandson." So sometimes, but it's more for personal reasons than it is I'm thinking, "Well, the order here doesn't make sense." The only other time I kind of will change the order, is based on actual traffic conditions.

Interviewee: If I know there's some road work going on here, I'm trying to avoid that place. Or I have, like just the other day, had one when it was like, well I guess their AI or whatever puts these routes together, doesn't realize that every day between four and six, Highway [number] outbound is a really, really terrible traffic situation.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And, it'll be slower. It might be shorter to go that way, but it will be much slower. So, I'll say, "I'm not doing it that way."

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What kind of data do you have to put in when you're doing a job? Like, do you scan in the packages at the beginning and then you record something when you drop them off? Or how does it work with the app?

Interviewee: We scan each package to kind of fill in what is our, what's called our itinerary. And then, sort of as, or as you deliver the packages, you either give them to the person you're delivering to or more often leave it on their door and take a picture that's stored in the app.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. And then, is Amazon recording your location and stuff?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah? Do you ever go somewhere that's rural enough that you don't have a signal?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you do then?

Interviewee: The app is, of course, they keep changing and updates to the app and things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Sometimes it will store it, I guess it's storing the information locally and then when I get back where there's a network connection, then it uploads it. There have been times though when I just have to, I'll leave it. I'll like take a picture actually on my phone, right in the regular phone just to cover my bases. And then when I get back where there's a signal, I would just call our support and say, "I need you to manually mark that, that I left it on their, on the customer's porch."

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Does that happen often, that you have to do it that way?

Interviewee: I wouldn't say it happens very often, just on occasion.

Interviewer: Just once in a while? Do you end up using the Facebook group to ask for advice for stuff like that?

Interviewee: It's funny you say that. Occasionally. I think more often than not in my area, people ask advice from me.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah?

Interviewee: They think I run the group because I'm very, I'm very, have been in the past, very active on it. And this time of year, we have a lot of new drivers they've hired, and so there's been a couple of them that ask me questions.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah? For [state] specifically?

Interviewee: Yeah well, specifically for [city].

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Interviewee: In [state], as far as I know, there are only two cities where Amazon has a Flex program, [city] and [city 2]. So, it's a very, I would say compared to other markets, [city], [state] is one of their smaller markets. And there's a short list of drivers. It's not that many people, and it's, geographically, it's a pretty small area that we deliver to.

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you ever seen them out on the roads?

Interviewee: Seen who?

Interviewer: The other Flex drivers?

Interviewee: Oh yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah? You can tell that there are other Flex drivers?

Interviewee: Yeah, I've seen-

Interviewer: Do they have to wear something or-

Interviewee: Yeah, I've seen-

Interviewer: Do they-

Interviewee: I've seen some of my friends before, where we pass each other and go, "Wow, how crazy is that?"

Interviewer: Oh, that's cool.

Interviewee: I very frequently see the Flex, not flex, but the Amazon vans that they mainly have. You see a lot of them.

Interviewer: Are the blocks for [city] throughout the day or are they concentrated at night or weekends or something?

Interviewee: Let me just say, it is varied a lot throughout the year that I've done this.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Because of some changes that they've made. So generally speaking, it has varied, but it has tended to be later in the day, like after 12. And then pretty consistently, like almost every single day at night we have like two hour blocks, we'll call cleanup blocks, that are for whatever reason, delivering packages that didn't get out earlier in the day.

Interviewer: Oh, and do those get posted the same day?

Interviewee: They do. They're typically posted around 5:00 PM.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And I've had a person at the distribution center before, tell me that, "Yeah, we have to, at five, we're told, we wait until five but after five we call, we kind of call it in and say this is what we got and we need y'all to, you know, put blocks out there for tonight."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They typically post after five.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, with the changes that you've mentioned, have there been big changes in the app that you've had to use?

Interviewee: I wouldn't say any major big changes in the app, just little things they're adding from time to time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Are there any new-

Interviewee: They've had a lot here lately. It seems like they've really ramped that up and there's been several things that they've added.

Interviewer: Like what?

Interviewee: The last thing that was added, and I think this was within the last two days, which is a good thing. There's now a thing that says that you're say safety line or something. In the menu, there's a red thing we can press. I haven't even read that, they did send an email I think yesterday, letting us know that this was added.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I haven't even read the, what it's for. But obviously, it says it's the safety helpline. So, I guess it's, if you're in a dangerous situation, it's something to maybe more immediately called him rather than the usual, you know, contacting customer support, which is, I will have to say, contacting customer support, there's a very limited number of things that they seem to be able to assist with. And beyond that, it's really not much help.

Interviewer: Yeah. When you are signing up for blocks, is it always the same number of packages?

Interviewee: Oh no.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It varies quite a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah. And then, have you ever run over time on your, on whatever block you signed up for?

Interviewee: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Do you get paid for the overtime?

Interviewee: I do. I think I've had maybe once or twice when, for whatever reason, I didn't. They don't give a reason. But generally speaking, I've always been paid for it.

Interviewer: Did you have to ask for it or they just paid you for the extra time?

Interviewee: No, I've had to ask for it.

Interviewer: Okay. And, how does this work compare to other work that you've done before?

Interviewee: Well, I've been doing it a year, so I guess there's something about it I enjoy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Right now, I think it's a pretty good deal and I think particularly where I am and the conditions that we have in [city], I think it's pretty good.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I'm on these other Facebook groups and I hear some things about the way things go in other cities and I think, "Well, I'm glad we don't have those problems." Of course everybody, there's good and bad about wherever you're at, but I think [city], it has been a pretty good year.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So do you think of yourself as an employee of Amazon or are you kind of like a contractor? Are you running a small business? Yeah.

Interviewee: Definitely a contractor, definitely a contractor. And I do, I did kind of just think of it as like, "I'm the small business, it is me."

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

Interviewee: You know, I always really just keep an open mind about this, because one thing about Amazon that I've learned is there's a lack of consistency. Things change and you may or may not have any explanation or it may or may not make sense to me. So, I just always kind of operate like on a short term basis and say, "This could change, this could go away at any time and I'll just find something else to do."

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, so I have a couple of questions left about the future of work.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: How do you feel about self driving cars?

Interviewee: I am cautiously optimistic I guess. I really, I don't think we're there yet. I don't know how people get there without taking some very serious risks, but I do think that definitely there's some, there ought to be some ways for technology to improve-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: People's driving habits. I think that's kind of already begun to happen. But in terms of totally self driving cars, maybe it's my age, I'm pretty pessimistic about saying I'll just get in. I don't think I would be comfortable getting into a car and just telling it where I want to go and not having any control over it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Could you imagine-

Interviewee: I'm not ready for that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Could you imagine Amazon using self driving cars?

Interviewee: Absolutely. I can absolutely imagine that. Again, whether I would think that's a good idea or not, but I can absolutely imagine that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, so those are all my questions. I'm going to stop recording.

Interviewee: Okay.