

Interviewer: Great. Can you tell me about how you found this job with Amazon?

Interviewee: Well, about a year ago when I relocated back to [city], I needed to make sure that I was making money right away. So I signed up prior to, because I moved from [state]. Prior to doing that I signed up for Uber and Lyft and started doing that. And when you start talking to other independent contractors, gig work people, and they start telling you about stuff. I mean, I had seen stuff online like DoorDash, Uber eats, all this, pretty much all of them. And I do a lot of them. And when I saw the Amazon one, I don't know because it was a year ago, I'm not positive if someone said something to me about it or if I saw it online.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you know that you wanted to do gig work? You mentioned talking to other gig folks.

Interviewee: What was that again?

Interviewer: Did you know that you wanted to do gig work in particular?

Interviewee: Yeah, because I'm almost eight months pregnant.

Interviewer: Oh yeah. Okay. So it has to be flexible. Yeah.

Interviewee: So therefore, with that it's just easier because I need to be flexible, like right now, this is why this is perfect, because then I can just work little blocks here and there and my belly is pretty big now and I can pick and choose. I'm not stuck at a certain job. And that's why it works great.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense.

Interviewee: And out of all the gig jobs ... Because I mean DoorDash, Uber, Lyft, I mean you name them, I'm on a lot of them and Amazon's my number one. And I do both the logistics, which is delivering the packages from the warehouse to the customer's door. And what I'm doing right now is full suit. Yeah. We don't have Prime now here in [city]. So if they had Prime now, I would do that too. But it works out well, because I'll mainly just deliver groceries just because I'm so big, but I still deliver packages. I mean, luckily I didn't have any packages delivered this week, but I mean I had plenty last week.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you get to pick which, or do you pick which one you're going to do that day? Or how does it work when you figure out whether you're going to do Whole Foods or packages?

Interviewee: Yeah, I wish. No, so what happens is, well, okay, so everything is different right now because they're ramping up for the holiday season. They hired a lot of new drivers and this is the part that really sucks. Is that us veteran drivers ... Well, right now what I'm doing is while I'm talking to you, that's why I connected you to my car, is I'm on their app. I don't know if you've seen their app or not, but you have to go on, click on offers, and then hit refresh over, and over, and over again all day long to try to get work.

And on Fridays they release what's called reserve blocks and what reserve blocks are is, they're just for us, but we have to be on here hitting offers, and hitting refresh over, and over, and over again. And so they haven't released them yet today, but they will come out today just, I don't know when. Like one time they released them at like 11 o'clock at night. They released on, the last like three weeks, one was at like 1:30, one was at like 4:30, and then I think it was 3:30 last week. I could have the 3:30 and 4:30 backwards, but that's when they did it. It's never a set time. It's random.

Interviewer: It's in the afternoon, not early in the morning, right? Would you say, these times?

Interviewee: I haven't seen any early in the morning. I've only seen them in just after noon, all the way up til like midnight.

Interviewer: Wow. That sounds late. So it's really hard to know what you're ... And is that when you sign up for the week, is that what you said or that's for the next day?

Interviewee: Yes. That's when they start putting out, well in our area, they didn't use to put out reserves to the warehouse until last week. And because we moved warehouses, our warehouse was in a city called [city 2]. And now the warehouse is in [city] by the airport. Basically they moved the warehouse 30 minutes away from where the other warehouse was.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.

Interviewee: I mean it works out for me because it's closer. A lot of people are complaining but I don't care.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It doesn't matter to me. But it does suck if now that the warehouse is down here and if we get packages to deliver to [city 3], our first stop could be 45 minutes an hour away. And how they're doing it is you sign up for hours. So, when they release these blocks, which is what I'm waiting for, Whole Foods, they do one or two hour blocks. So, the reserves are going to drop two hours.

Anytime that they drop a one hour, it'll be last minute and it'll be for like that day because they have a bunch of packages to deliver and they need more drivers. And the warehouse they drop, typically it's in our area. I mean I see other people posting online. If you follow that thread that you posted this ad on, you'll see that there's different hours and stuff based on location. But here they mainly do four, three and a half, and three.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewee: Every once in a blue moon they'll drop a two hour if they really need to get packages out and it's late in the evening because we can only deliver until 9:00 PM.

Interviewer: Oh, I didn't know that. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. So delivery hours are only until 9:00 PM.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Interviewee: It was 9:30 up until about two months ago.

Interviewer: Do you know why it changed?

Interviewee: I have no idea.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I just remember logging in and going, wait. Oh. Because what they do with, well, they keep making changes, but how it used to be is that if I took a block, like a four hour block from two to six. I can pick up another warehouse from like six to nine, or six [inaudible 00:09:22]. So I could double up that day and work like a full day.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And then, usually when we we're working late it's the truck came in late and so our blocks are sometimes two thirty, three, four o'clock in the afternoon. So doubling up is really hard. Especially when they cut it off at nine and they typically don't release those two hour blocks. But if they're desperate they'll release them, but it's few and far between. Plus here, well since they opened a new warehouse last week, the blocks are starting at noon. But before that, so the last like seven months that I've been doing it full-time, rarely would there be a block before one o'clock. All of our blocks here for warehouse started at one, and in the last like seven, eight months I've seen one time there was some blocks for eight and eight thirty in the morning. Only one time.

Interviewer: Okay. When you sign up for things, how many blocks do you try to grab?

Interviewee: As many as I can.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you end up working on weekends too?

Interviewee: Yeah. Up until really recently, like this week, I was working seven days a week.

Interviewer: Wow. Is it hard to do that many hours of driving?

Interviewee: Do you know it takes different types of people because I will talk ... [inaudible 00:10:49] are like warehouse people, other drivers, all sorts of people and people that work at the warehouse are like, "I don't know how you drive all day." And like, "I'm just used to it." Yeah. I'm used to the traffic, I'm just used to driving in it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. You-

Interviewee: It doesn't bug me, but I know other people get irritated with it. But just like the people that have driving jobs, they're kind of accustomed to it.

Interviewer: Yeah. You mentioned that this is your first choice of the jobs that you have right now. Do you grab the Amazon blocks first and then when you're not doing an Amazon shift, you sign onto a different app?

Interviewee: Correct.

Interviewer: And then do it?

Interviewee: Yeah. So if, okay, for instance, let's say yesterday, so I had a Whole Food shift in the morning. I had it from seven thirty to nine thirty in the morning, but I didn't have a warehouse block until noon. So my options were go home and fiddle fart around or I could just continue to make money. Of course I'm like, "Well, I might as well make money. I'm already out here." So I turned on DoorDash, Grubhub, Uber and Lyft. And out of those four I just like slipping in between them, just doing whatever pays.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Is there one that you like least of these? Is there one that doesn't pay as well?

Interviewee: Well, I don't like Uber Eats. Because, and here's the reason I don't like it, because just like when you pick up an Uber or Lyft driver or a passenger, you don't know where you're going. So when I sign on for Grubhub or DoorDash, when they send me an offer, I know how much I'm going to get paid and I know where I'm going. Start to finish. I know that I am picking up from this restaurant and I am taking it to this house. Now, it doesn't give me the exact address of the customer until I accept it, but it basically has a pin that tells me where I'm going to drop it off. And if I don't like that restaurant or neighborhood, no matter what they're paying me is a straight decline.

Where Uber Eats, and Uber, and Lyft, you don't know. So it's a crap shoot. Yeah. I kind of like guarantees, as far as how much am I going to get paid? Is it worth it to me? Because I'm always weighing my options. And what's the best before I take it?

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So, between these different jobs did you get a lot of training up front, or how did you figure out how to do the job and kind of tips and tricks for getting it done?

Interviewee: Learnt it on my own. Okay. Okay, because you want to focus on Amazon. Amazon has some training videos on their site, but I don't know if you read that thread, you'll see a lot of people are confused by them. I kind of just huh, and just go in and you just kind of fumble along. I tried to talk to other people or look on some of those blogs to see if I have a question first before I'll ask one. And I try to help out other people. Especially doing Whole Foods, because we hired so many new people, I'm in the back quite a bit picking up my stuff and then helping out the new people and how to do it. And it's just kind of like a stumble through it.

Interviewer: Yeah. I don't know if something's gone wrong in your trips before, but have you had to call a manager? Is there somebody that you can talk to when something goes wrong?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. You've got to call support. Some of the big things that happen is, okay, mainly when you're delivering packages, they have like a geo locator of where the house is. But being here in [state] we have a lot of rural routes and new homes because we're just expanding nonstop. And that geode will say, "The house is over here." It's not, it could be a couple of miles away from where they said it was. Well, Amazon won't let you hit delivered unless you are within the zone of where they say the house is. A lot of times on a lot of these routes I'll sometimes I'll be calling support 10 times for them to update the location. And what support will do is, I'm standing on their porch and they'll pick my location and move the geode and drop it where I'm at. So the next driver can deliver it to the right house.

Interviewer: Oh. So they update their map from you calling in?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, that's good. That seems good.

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: Cool.

Interviewee: So, that's good. But you know, I mean that's counting on the driver, you've got to count on other drivers to do their job. They don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. You mentioned that there were a couple issues that come up a lot and that's one of them. What are some of the other issues?

Interviewee: People don't know their own address.

Interviewer: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure. So they type in something crazy and, yeah.

Interviewee: They don't know their own addresses, and you're like, look, this address does not exist. You're trying everything, you can't find it and then you try to call the customer. Well, since all the calls are masked. So my territory, it comes as a [area code] number, a [city 4] number. So that's like what I'm calling out on. A lot of people see that and it's not a [city] number, so they send me to voicemail or whatever. And a lot of times they can't get back to me and I mean I text them too. I don't just call them, that's it. And that makes the job difficult when you can't get ahold of the customer, because out here being rural, people leave their dogs running loose on their property.

And well we can't deliver to mailboxes or anything like that, unless your special instructions, "Deliver it to the front door." Well, there's a big old German Shepherd growling at you. It makes it very difficult for you to drop off your package. And unfortunately I've been bit.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Because a careless owner, which was out there just basically, didn't do anything about their dog and I'm walking back to my car and it attacked me. So, I don't even mess around there's a dog, the package is either going right where I'm at, or it's going back to the warehouse. Because I'm not getting out of the car. I've gotten my car dug up by dogs jumping on it, like trying to get me.

And it's a safety thing. And a lot of these owners don't understand, "Why didn't you deliver my package, my dog's friendly." Well we don't know that. And they're growling. Like the one that bit me didn't show any aggression whatsoever.

Interviewer: Yeah. And I'm sure it's different experience with stranger versus owner, so.

Interviewee: Exactly. I mean, even one of my friends this past week was mad. He posted on Facebook, he was mad because the Amazon driver left the package in his yard, and he posted about it and was like, "This ridiculous or whatever." And then I immediately responded to him and I said, "So do you got a dog loose on your property?" And he replies back, "Well, not loose, it's on a chain." And I'm like, "Is it obstructing the porch, like you couldn't get there?" "Well, yeah." And I said, "Well that's why your package was left there.

I'm like, "You're lucky you got it because their option really is to take it back. I'd be thankful they left it for you." And then he goes, "Oh, I didn't think about that." And I'm like, "Yeah." I was like, "When you ask for package to be delivered," because this is all over the terms and whatever. "and you're inviting us onto your property. So you're supposed to make your property safe for us to come on it."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: If you've got attack whatever, they need to be put up so we can complete our job.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That's so true.

Interviewee: And I mean, prime example, one of my friends I've been friends with for years, I had to go on there and say it and then he was like, "Oh, I get it."

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee: I mean, unfortunately, I had to say it to my mom too. [inaudible 00:19:25]. She was like, "Whoa." I'm like, "Mom, yes [inaudible 00:19:31] great and whatever. But she's already bit people, you need to put her away." My mom's got it now, but people just don't think.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee: And it makes our job real hard.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Have you ever posted in the Facebook group to ask for advice?

Interviewee: I don't know.

Interviewer: Not that you remember?

Interviewee: If I have posted asking for advice, what it would be is it would be in, okay ... My local group here, like [city] drivers?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: If you go on Facebook there should be like [Location], Amazon Flex Driver. We have like our own little page. But most of us stay in contact by using Skype. And so we have a couple of chat rooms and sites, which we try to help each other out, because those warehouse blocks ... Sorry, one second.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: You used to like, you had to sit there and swipe all morning and my boyfriend would get mad at me because he's like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "We can't go do anything until I [inaudible 00:20:51]." You know what I told you like that offers a refresh until I get a block? I was spending four or five hours every morning because they drop them at random times, for me to get that block. And he was like, "This is ridiculous." I feel the same way.

Interviewer: Yeah. Prefer not to have it be this way. Yeah.

Interviewee: Right? I mean, but you know it's great about Amazon, whatever. But the way they assign the work is ridiculous because I'm spending over eight hours a day to work for three. Because you can't go to another app. You have to literally sit here religiously and hit refresh over, and over, and over again. Like I've been doing the whole time we were on our call, which I've been doing since eight o'clock this morning.

Interviewer: Oh. It's so rough. How much you get paid an hour? Does that vary a lot by the type of block it is or anything like that?

Interviewee: Okay, so we have two different ones. So the base for logistics, is 18 an hour. If they are desperate and they have a lot of blocks, and they need a lot of drivers and no one's keeping them up real fast, they'll start increasing the pay. I've taken blocks where ... Most of the ones I've done have been at 18 an hour, but I've gotten blocks at \$30 an hour, and then that's warehouse. So that's logistics, that's delivering packages to the door. And then when it comes to Whole Foods, and I believe Prime now is the same way because you're delivering groceries. With Whole Foods, what I'm doing is they pay me 15 an hour, so whether I get deliveries or not, they're paying me for two hours to sit here. My base is \$30 and now I'm going to go take my deliveries and then it's based on the customer's tips. So I've gotten anywhere from nothing in tips after I've done deliveries up to like \$55 for a two hour block.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: The average is usually between 10 and 20 bucks, to be honest.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay. Let me see-

Interviewee: And then you add that to the 30 so I mean sometimes I'm making like \$80 for two hours.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. That's why that would be a better option than some of the other ones.

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly. But also you could be driving all these miles wasting all this gas and the customer don't tip. Then you're making less than 15 an hour.

Interviewer: Yeah. Since you've been working with the app and stuff, have you seen any big new features or new software?

Interviewee: They've been doing a lot of updates lately. They just released the emergency call button, I guess, that's like the 911 thing. Oh and then they offered ... And then a couple of weeks ago they put out a filter, so you could filter what stations you see offers from. But that's for like the bigger areas, it doesn't really apply to ... Essentially we've got either Whole Foods or the warehouse. We don't have, there's not like choices of different warehouses and different Whole Foods locations.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Let me see. When you think about this job, do you think of yourself as an employee of Amazon? Or are you kind of like a freelancer? Are you running sort of a small business?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, we shouldn't be thinking of ourselves as employees because we're not. And so, I mean, because I can do it or not. When you're an employee and they give you work, it's not a, "Oh, I want to do this, or don't."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: We choose to work when we want and they don't say that we have to do it from this time to this time. So we're running our own business and that's why I was saying earlier, I like those apps where I can see how much money I'm going to make and already in my head, I know how long it's going to take me. I always try to make sure that I average over 20 an hour. That's how I run things. Now, I watch people like on the DoorDash chat groups and stuff like that on there, and they're taking those \$2 offers and it's taking them 30 minutes and they're making no money, they're losing money. And like every business owner, because you've got to run this like a business. So every business owner, you've got to look at what's profitable for you and what's profitable for me is running the multiple platforms and figuring it all out. And knowing where I'm going to make my money. But yeah, I don't really work for less than 20 an hour.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. And then-

Interviewee: And I'm consistent with it. I average 20 to 35 an hour.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Yeah. I was going to ask, do you end up having similar numbers of hours of work each day?

Interviewee: If I want to work, I work, if I don't, I don't.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So my last-

Interviewee: Like with Amazon, I can work ... One week I worked like 20 hours. And I just did Whole Foods and I made, I don't know, like 700 bucks.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah.

Interviewee: I mean that's a good week.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. I have two more questions left, which are sort of about the future of work. Do you worry about things like self-driving cars?

Interviewee: No, I wish they'd have them so they'd be less accidents on the road.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. But no, I don't worry about them. The cost of the cars, like the electric cars, like the Teslas and whatnot that would be self-driving, they're so expensive. They're out of the realm for a lot of people.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee: So we're looking at many years from now before, like if that were a threat ... Well that's how I feel anyway. If it would actually be a threat, I don't know.

Interviewer: And could you imagine Amazon using self-driving cars?

Interviewee: How are they going to deliver the packages?

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true.

Interviewee: I mean, everything Amazon does ... Okay. I've seen like those drones and this, that and the other. Yeah, it sounds good, but the drone has to know which box to take and all this stuff. I would say that, that we're a little further away from that. Because you got to get the box to their porch and I'll tell you what, some of these people do not make it easy for you to get to their doorstep.

Interviewer: I'm sure. Yeah. I'm sure.

Interviewee: They do not make it easy, whatsoever.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. We got through all my questions. Thank you so much for talking to me. I'm going to stop recording now.