

LOCKWOOD/MCKINNON

SPOTLIGHT SERIES



I first met Erik Martinez in the Shift Lead SPARK class a number of years ago. He stood out to me because he made his voice heard.... but the characteristic I remember most was his creative side. During one of our breaks in the class – Erik chose to stay seated and doodle. Some talented doodles – in my opinion. This is where we began our interview today. Erik agreed to a virtual interview from Cranston 2.

Let's start by saying that he is a prime example of development opportunities within Lockwood/McKinnon. He saw the possibilities, worked towards them and is now the RGM of Cranston 2. But...he didn't always aspire to being a manager of a Taco Bell...he started as a YMCA youth counselor. As a youth counselor, Erik created lesson plans on anything from nutrition, family, staying active, respect, togetherness, and communication.

Erik saw the growth potential at Lockwood/McKinnon and soon became part of the Taco Bell culture. His desire to work with people and his focus on his development brought him to become a Shift Lead. He carried with him skills from his previous job as a youth counselor. In speaking with Erik – it is apparent that he enjoys what he does. During the interview – team members entered the office and Erik was more than willing to help them with whatever was needed. Teaching and encouraging as he spoke – creating a sort of calm. An approachable sort.

One of three siblings – Erik grew up admiring the fortitude of his mother. He states, "She became more to take care of her kids." The family grew when his mother remarried and an additional sister joined Erik's family circle. He beams when speaking of his mother. She is his role model. She worked a number of jobs: Dunkin Donuts, KFC, assistant manager, factory work, tractor trailer driver, and a school bus driver. The amazing part is that she, not only, worked these jobs at different times during his formative years – but that she made sure there was food on the table and everything was prepared for her children before she went to work or before they came home from school.



He believes that his desire to explore film-making – stems from growing up with family night at the movies. They would sit and enjoy a movie over a weekend as a family and snack on popcorn (of course), gummy bears and – Erik's favorite – jelly beans. These movie nights were a contributing factor in Erik's desire to study the creative arts: photography, drawing, film-making, writing short-stories and joining New Urban Arts – a non-profit in Providence.

Erik states that a number of women in his life have been role models to him. In addition to his mother – he admires the character, Cristina Yang, in the show Grey's Anatomy. Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) is a Cardio- Thoracic Surgeon in the show and Erik states that as a child he wanted to become a doctor. But, his admiration for the character is more about her confidence in herself and her outlook. There was a scene where Cristina is being "complimented" by an admirer. The admirer says



she is beautiful and continues in that vain. Cristina stops him and tells him, 'Compliment my mind. Beauty is just a shell, but it's what's inside that matters' (or something like that). Erik compares this to an Easter Egg...they are beautiful on the outside, but hollow inside. Don't be fooled by what you see outwardly – get to know the person on a deeper level.

Erik is a "helper." He has spent some time helping out his sister with his nephews. She needed him to help get them to school in the morning and he did so. When describing the act – he makes it known that – of course he would help. Friends ask him to help them move all the time and he thinks nothing of doing so. I think we would be hard-pressed to find something that Erik would not help others do. He is, after all, a self-proclaimed 'people person'.

One thing that Erik does not understand is when people do not go outside of their comfort zone...people who conform and don't allow themselves to grow. Sometimes people get stuck in what they know and complain about any number of things, but they don't seem to put forth the effort to fix it. Erik says, "I ask...what have you done to change that..." whatever it is that needs changing. To decrease stress, you have to "name it and deal with it."

Meeting people and having conversations with them is something that Erik loves to do. He would love to travel to Thailand, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Ukraine and a few countries in Europe. Not only does he want to meet the people and get to know them and their culture – but he wants to try the foods from their region. He smiles and tells me a story about going out to different restaurants with a friend. His friend would choose restaurants that did not have hamburgers and fries on the menu. Then Erik would have to try something new. (He does still like hamburgers and fries, though.) Food makes him happy.

He has traveled to California, Florida, Canada, Mexico and Guatemala. Erik explains that in Guatemala, coffee is very popular. He loves coffee. Apparently – Guatemalan families think nothing of giving their young family members – diluted – coffee at a young age. Coffee is easy to have and make. Erik tells me that coffee also makes him happy...especially a coffee of a certain brand (we won't mention here).



Erik would like to learn a few languages. He currently speaks English and Spanish, but would love to bolster his American Sign Language (ASL) and learn French and Japanese.

I ask Erik about how things have changed this year – in the store – with the different environment created by the pandemic. He doesn't skip a beat in his response. He misses being able to socialize with friends outside of work ... grab a beer and unwind. He shares that many on the team work their shift at the store and go to other jobs or they go home to take care of their families. Often what is missing are the celebrations and the get-togethers. He says that at work he wants to make things as comfortable for his team as possible. He wants to make work positive when the team comes in. His goal is to give them something to look forward to. His thoughts go towards maybe a holiday party and gift – sharing, perhaps some decorations – something to uplift the mood. There are some other ideas that Erik has – but I won't share them – so as not to ruin any surprises he has in store.

There is much more to learn about Erik Martinez, but our interview has come to an end. Several team members need his help and he is ready to do so. Who knows – perhaps one of those team members he is helping will take the path that Erik has and that SPARK will ignite in them like it did in Erik. They have quite the role model and it's a fine partnership.

Lisa Brissette