

“If you are persistent you can overcome anything.”

— **DEANNA BYRD**,
Baltimore Marriott Waterfront

I was hired to work at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront the day it opened in 2001. I had two young children and I was really excited to get a steady full-time job there as a Hostess in the Apropos Restaurant.

I can't believe I've been at the Marriott for 20 years. My co-workers are like family. I love them all and I don't tolerate managers mistreating any of them.

Many times over the years we have told each other: "We need a union here, someone to represent us," usually right after HR would ignore us and dismiss our problems without doing anything, again. Sometimes HR and the managers would laugh at us as we left their office.

But the Union talk never went anywhere. We didn't know what steps to take, and everyone was afraid to lose their job, including me.

I've always had a strong reputation. Older managers told newer ones: "You should know that Deanna will speak up for herself." If supervisors piled work on me, I would tell them, "I'm just one person and I can't do all this at once. Either send someone to help, or you can help me yourself."

Our hours started getting cut. When they needed me to work overtime I was always there, but when it got slow, they sent me home early. My paycheck shrunk and our raises were small. After nearly 20 years, Marriott only paid me \$13 an hour.

One Marriott Director constantly disrespected us in public, yelling and demeaning workers in front of others. She made my co-workers cry. HR ignored our complaints about her. I finally confronted her and said "you can't just talk to people any kind of way. Your name is not on this building. You work for Marriott just like I do." Finally, the union talk got serious.

I was pretty terrified to get involved in the union organizing. I wanted the union, but I feared the worst, losing my job. I was living as a single mom because my husband was incarcerated at the time, so everything at home—supporting myself and three children—was on my shoulders.

A union organizer and one of my co-workers finally got me over my fears. They were patient and explained the way we could fight for respect and job security. I started going to union meetings, and four of us in my restaurant worked together to get it organized. The Black and Latinx workers joined together. I wore my union button and brought my co-workers to protests outside the hotel. I stayed close to my co-workers, to encourage them and reassure them that we had rights and we would stick together to protect each other.

When it came time to vote on the Union, things got really tense. Some of the workers campaigned with anti-union literature and posters. It was sad to battle each other instead of working together to benefit everyone.

Honestly, I wasn't sure we would win the vote. I did everything possible to stay positive and keep people focused on the changes we wanted to make in our jobs and our lives

But we did win the vote!

Now I feel secure. When I have an issue, I get something done about it. Together as a union, we make HR resolve it, not brush us off. And our union contract guarantees we keep our jobs if the hotel gets sold, and we get recalled from Covid layoffs, by seniority.

I've had Covid twice and I have asthma. Its been really rough, but my co-workers are my union family and helped me get through it.

Life is hard. Times are hard. You hear "No" all the time. But if you are persistent you can overcome anything.



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