

SIDNEY CHUN • SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

Platform Worker Realizes Their Own Platform



Matthew Lister

Matthew Lister recently garnered national attention in the nanny industry after he wrote a blog about a nanny's job duties versus job description. Matthew is known as "Manny Poppins" and was already well known in the industry for his special needs childcare blog. Seattle nannies informed LevelUp about the viral blog in the past few weeks, and I had to reach out to Matthew to learn more about him and see what his intentions were with the blog. We connected over the weekend by phone and had the following interview Monday, Sept. 16th, night after he got off work.

Hi Matthew, you recently wrote a blog that stirred up the nanny community this past month. Before we get into that, tell us a little bit about yourself.

What made you become a nanny?

I became a nanny by accident. When I was 22 years old, I went to a house party while living in Pennsylvania, and I saw two kids that I felt weren't in a good environment. Their parents weren't able to take care of them that night. I stopped partying and stayed the night to watch them. The next day, the parents asked if I could watch them again, and shortly I became the designated babysitter for them. Afterward, their friends asked me to watch their kids. I didn't intend to become a nanny, but once I saw a need and realized I could make a difference in the lives of children and their families, it became a calling.

How long have you been a nanny?

English

I started babysitting in 1992 by helping friends. I started nanny work in 1993. It's been about 26 years now. I calculate it by how old my first nanny kid is. I still talk to them almost every day, and they're 26 years old.

What do you currently do?

My current position is being a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) with a company providing Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy with children on the autism spectrum. I'm a nanny and sitter on evenings and weekends. I do not and can not provide therapy to my nanny kids - I must work under a Board Certified Behavior Analyst for the therapy work.

What did it take to become certified?

To become an RBT, I had to complete an extensive 40-hour course, pass a competency assessment, background checks, and sit through a grueling exam. The company I work for also required the completion of at least 60 hours of college credits. I had about double that amount of university credits, but haven't received my degree. Annually, there is ongoing training, re-passing competency assessments, and renewing my application.

What does a typical day look like for you?

I wake up at 6:15 am and get to work by 8 am. Provide two 2-hour therapy sessions and one 2-hour therapy

session, with breaks in between and oversight watching numerous children with other RBTs, for like recess and their lunchtime. The BCBA provides a treatment plan, and I, as an RBT, follow that treatment plan to provide interventions and collect data for the BCBA to analyze. I leave the therapy center at 6 pm after a 10-hour shift.

I then come home and work on nanny industry related stuff like helping organize local nanny events, create training materials, provide info in nanny groups, and respond to nannies' direct messages. On nights that I have nanny jobs and sitting gigs, I leave from work and go to those jobs. I also do nanny work on weekends.

How are you so well known? What else do you do?

One thing nannies can't see behind the screen is that a lot of what I do is behind the scenes. What they see in the nanny groups is just a portion of what I'm doing. I also help organizations when they seek assistance, as well as respond to weekly requests from nannies to help them with their resumes and references so they can be more marketable to employers.

I get requests on helping with workplace violations, and on how to handle behavioral issues. A lot of ABA concepts are used in the nanny world like positive reinforcement, forward chaining, backward chaining, etc. I help those who ask for help to understand things like looking for an antecedent to understand the

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purpose of the behaviors - concepts most of us already use day today. Things I don't feel qualified advise on or things too close to therapy I refer them to professionals in their area.

It seems like A LOT of nannies communicate with you in these nanny groups.

The reason nannies come to me is because I say what needs to be said and move on. I try to always apologize if I come across the wrong way or hurt

someone. Tone does not come across well in writing, and I always try to be as respectful as possible.

I do get contacted because the advice I give is usually pretty reliable due to my experience and my abilities to research topics and provide resources. I also say, 'I don't know but let me try to find someone who does.' In these groups, I have had to earn the respect of these nannies.

Some nannies think you take the sides of employers. Can you talk more on that?

For eight years, I was a father figure for my first nanny kid and another child I was taking care of. Because of those relationships, I can see from both the employee and employer's point of view in certain situations. I think that's the crux of why some nannies don't understand me in the groups. I do sometimes come across as taking the side of the parents when I feel it

appropriate. Sometimes I think the parents just do not know the law or know how to communicate their frustrations and course correct a situation. Many parents are just as ignorant of the laws as we were when we first became nannies. I try to have that balance of respect.

If an employer sees their nanny doing something they don't like, they just fire them. If the nanny feels taken advantage of, they are ready to just quit. That urge to quit and end the business relationship goes both ways. It boils down to communication, and I encourage discussion whenever I can and try to see both sides of the issue before giving my opinion.

I am a nanny. I fight for nannies, and I can't express how I fight for nannies because much of what I do is protected by Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs). But people communicate with me in the nanny groups because I have earned respect. I didn't demand it or even expect it, but I have received it.

Alright, give us the backstory on the blog that made ripple effects across the nanny industry. First, what gave you the desire to write it?

I followed someone else's advice.

Here's the backstory. This past Spring, I read a Facebook post in a group that a nanny who was receiving guaranteed hours was asked to organize the children's closets while the family was on vacation. The family then asked the nanny to feed the dog every

day while they were gone since she would be at the house. The nanny's reply was, 'It's not my job.' And many agreed with her. And they were correct, but that irritated me.

That same day in another group, a nanny was asking about work from home job opportunities while on the job. They stated they were bored during the day due to the child sleeping a lot. I offered some advice about doing some tiny chores in the home to help the family, since she had complained about the clutter before. I

ended up getting in a long argument and wrote a lengthy response in the comment section. A lot of people liked it. The positive remarks were validating my comments, and I thought this was a common belief in our community.

What led you to post a blog about it?

Someone asked if I would post my response to 30seconds (a blog site for women). My original comments were about 1500 words total, and I could only submit 400 words, so it took about a month or two to edit down to 400 words to post it. Work and procrastination caused the delay. In retrospect, I was yelling at two nannies in this blog, and it was hypocritical of me to publish the post because I typically urge communication.

What were the initial responses like?

When the blog went live, I wasn't anticipating the

response. I got a lot of valuable feedback. Nannies reached out to me and helped me realize that I may have written it for a specific situation, but the entire industry read it as well.

I took every comment to heart. One particular feedback read that the majority of nannies are not paid legally or overtime and are treated wrong. In other words, I should have stepped in their shoes BEFORE I published my comments. That made the light bulb go on for me. My blog was responding to a few specific situations in some Facebook groups, but I didn't think of the negative impact on the entire industry.

I also didn't realize it was going to get such a big reach and so many shares. The blog was shared in every nanny group in the country, by someone else, especially AFTER I had begun to change my views. I am doing all I can to take the article down.

Is there anything that you would change about the process or blog since it went live in June?

Yes. I thought I was calling out two nannies. I didn't realize at that time that I actually was speaking to the entire industry. Now I understand that with my platform comes responsibility. I will make sure my words on any platform reflect professionalism and dignity within our industry. Had I realized people were listening to what I had to say I wouldn't have written it

Throughout the last few months, I've gotten great feedback that has helped me learn and grow so I can continue making a difference. I will use this to learn and grow.

I've heard from some nannies that the blog came off as condescending, disregarding the progress workers are fighting for in their contracts, and that this blog post set the industry back. What would you say to that criticism?

I want to make a difference in this industry. This whole experience has humbled me. I'm sorry if nannies in Seattle thought all of these critiques were industry directed. At the time, they were not, but I do see now how it DID reflect on the industry. I haven't lived in Washington State - I want to. But because I don't yet, I didn't get a chance to follow the progress they made with the bill of rights as I wish I was able to. I understand how potential employers could misuse my article to put pressure on a nanny, and for that I am sorry for that potential damage. That is why I am fighting to get it deleted.

Can you speak on the tone of your blog?

Yes. The past 26 years, I've worked with children and teens who were either extremely literal - think Sheldon Cooper from the show The Big Bang Theory - or children who are non-verbal, so my way of communicating is different. I typically overexplain. I

never realized it came across as "mansplaining" as some have stated. For that, I apologize. I do know I come off as condescending at times because my neurotypical friends have occasionally mentioned it to me. I swear I try to be cautious of that, but with the written word where nobody can see body language or hear my tone, I do see how it can come across as condescending. A lot more forethought and respect should have gone into the article.

It's hard to pick up tone in a Facebook post. Do you see a difference in what you read online versus what you hear in-person about the day to day struggles nannies face?

All I see are the day to day struggles nannies post in Facebook groups. But the real horror stories aren't on Facebook. I got deeply involved in the fight for the last eight months with the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and learned I was very ignorant of the plight of the industry. But once I began getting educated, you're damn right I dug my heels in, ready to fight for nannies on every level of this industry.

Despite the uproar from the nanny community, you were recently nominated to join the National Domestic Workers Alliance Platform Workers Council. I know they choose their nominees carefully and have an extensive vetting process. What are you most excited to accomplish if you

were voted to join the board?

English

NDWA contacted me in the Winter of 2018, and I respectfully declined their invitation because I didn't feel I knew enough about the industry to speak about it or represent it. Possible Non-Disclosure Agreements may apply so I won't say anything other than it was NOT writing any bill of rights or standards as some have falsely implied. But I began to really dig in and research the industry, try to understand it, and wanting to learn as much as possible. Then I was re-

contacted in the Spring of 2019 and became more involved behind the scenes.

I am extremely honored to be nominated. You are correct. NDWA chooses their nominees very carefully based on numerous factors that all must line up, and what little I have heard, the vetting process is extensive. Again, it is a great honor to be nominated, and all I will say is that I am ready to be a part of a bigger team to make a difference and it is a responsibility I take very seriously.

You mentioned you currently live in Louisiana, but that you were hoping to move to Seattle soon. Why Seattle?

Because there is a big need for special needs childcare. Recently in a national special needs parenting Facebook group, a parent from Washington State had said that she had had to quit her job

because her 6-year-old got kicked out of kindergarten due to his aggression. She had already gone through nannies in one month when she tried to go back to work. There are other behaviors the child contends with as well. But she made it clear that there's a huge gap in the special needs childcare community.

I know that there is a lot of conversations happening on how to create community and advocacy for nannies in Seattle. What would you like to see in the organization you would want to

partner up with once you've moved to the Pacific Northwest?

I want to see:

1. Growth
2. Community
3. I'm well versed in my corner of the industry, which is special needs childcare, as well as platform work and am well respected. I hope they can teach me and allow me to bring my specialties to their table.
4. I want to make sure that the organization fights for every nanny to have every right that every corporate person has. Being a nanny is harder than being a corporate officer.
5. I want to see Washington state be a powerhouse leading the nanny industry in this nation. It has the drive to do just that.



English

Comments (5)

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Laura A day ago · 0 Likes

Matthew, thank you for providing such a thoughtful response to our community. You have a large platform and I'm glad you're using it responsibly

Emily Kate A day ago · 1 Like

Matthew and Sydney, excellent article. I've worked with Matthew on several project and knew his intentions. You couldn't meet a nicer guy than him. Thank you for giving him this opportunity to clarify himself.

Sidney Chun A day ago · 0 Likes

Thank you, Emily! Thanks for going public about your comments and support! <3

Nanny98115 A day ago · 1 Like

Matthew THOUSANDS of nannies were pissed off by your blog but apologizing is a good first step to making things right.

nycnanny A day ago · 1 Like

Thanks Matt!

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