

Podcast: Josue Ceullar

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>> Janet Weber: This is Journeys of learning. Where we talk to students that have taken unconventional pathways to reach their educational goals. I'm Janet Weber, I'm your host and a counselor at De Anza College, and I created this podcast so that students will feel less alone on their own journeys of learning.

>> Janet Weber: We are here with Josue Cuellar and I start each episode by talking about how I know you, and the reason I know you is through Bianca. You and Bianca are fiancés and getting married in September.

>> Josue Cuellar: September 15th.

>> Janet Weber: Now I'm going to turn it over to you and have you tell me a little bit about your background and where you came from and all of that.

>> Josue Cuellar: Okay, sounds good. So I grew up in a small town East Palo Alto, right next to Palo Alto. It's literally a small bridge that separates both cities. I went to a local middle school there, Cesar Chavez, then kind of switched over and then went to a catholic school for a couple of years, from 6th to 8th. Then I attended Woodside High School, which is kind where I would say my journey kind of

started. First to graduate from high school in my family out of four siblings. Me being the youngest out of the boys. So two older brothers, one younger sister.

>> Janet Weber: What about your parents?

>> Josue Cuellar: So, my mom, she actually I think the furthest that she ever got to was, I want to say the 6th grade. I think the furthest my dad got was probably even less than that. So their education wasn't -- not because it wasn't there, but they had other obligations so it wasn't their main obligation.

>> Janet Weber: Well, congratulations. First one in your family to graduate high school.

>> Josue Cuellar: And then the first to go to college.

>> Janet Weber: Wow.

>> Josue Cuellar: So I kind of dabbled into technology during high school. There was a small program called Academy where they kind of taught us a little bit about software, more HTML, and how to build websites and stuff. That is kind of what got me into wanting to be a computer designer or web designer. Once I went to college, I went to Foothill. I'm sure you are very familiar with Foothill.

>> Janet Weber: Um-hmm.

>> Josue Cuellar: That is where I started. I did a couple of classes. I didn't really know

what I wanted to do. I did know that it was in graphic design though. I started a couple of classes, got my general ED done and stuff. I didn't finish college, and not because I didn't want to finish college, it's just I had other plans in my life. When I was 20 years old, I moved to Los Angeles and I had a small auto business when I moved to Los Angeles. I didn't go to school, but I did want to do something and I went to a trade school. I got my license to be a smog technician. I worked as a smog technician for about a year and then saved up some money to open my own shop and I ran a shop for about four years while I lived in Los Angeles.

>> Janet Weber: Why did you move to Los Angeles in the first place?

>> Josue Cuellar: I kind of wanted a different scene. So it was my first time moving out of my mom's house, so it was the first time I moved out of my parents. I kind of just wanted a different scene. I knew I wanted to go somewhere else but I didn't want to go too far, so I felt like Los Angeles was close enough but yet far enough from home. I didn't want to be in smog for the rest of my life. It's very tough to own your own business. To be in the smog check business. Too many regulations, but that's another story as well. Then I moved back in 2015. So I was in Los Angeles from 2011 to about mid-2015. And then I decided to move back. When I moved back, I had plans of going back to school because I really wanted to get back into the software engineering. So I started to taking a few classes for software

engineering. But then work got in the way again and school just wasn't a priority at the moment, so I started working a lot again. Got into a couple of good restaurants in Los Altos, Palo Alto, Los Gatos. And then that is like around the time I met Bianca. Right after I was done with all the restaurants is when I got my job at Apple in 2018. That's when I met Bianca. And that is kind of what started my journey into wanting to be a software engineer now. I went back to De Anza. I took my CS, my computer science degree. But again, I was really interested in the coding classes. I really enjoyed it, solving all the coding problems, getting the end and building applications and small web pages. I really didn't have any interest in learning English or science or history. And that is one thing too that I want to say just because you have no interest in some classes doesn't mean that school is not for you. There is a lot of other different routes that you can take.

>> Janet Weber: And also, you're working full time at Apple right now?

>> Josue Cuellar: Right.

>> Janet Weber: It's hard to do school when you are working full time.

>> Josue Cuellar: Right. That is another reason that school kind of conflicted with me because of the time that I would work. My schedule is from 4:00 in the morning to 12:30 pm. Right at graveyard area. School wasn't working for me, so I got boot camp recommended

to me, which I am currently in. It's called App Academy. It's a yearlong program. They pretty much teach you everything that you would be doing on a day-to-day basis in a software company as a software engineer. I decided to pay the money and I am taking an education, but it's in software engineer and that's what it's basing on, just learning different languages and doing the day-to-day stuff. That is kind of like my journey that I've taken.

>> Janet Weber: Tell me again about the program you're in right now.

>> Josue Cuellar: It's a software engineer program. It was recommended to me by one of my sister's friends. She's a project engineer at Facebook. I guess it would now be Meta. I had a couple of interviews in software engineering or quality assurance. I keep getting the same feedback that I don't have any experience, and it's very hard to hire someone without any experience, or without a degree. The good thing about software companies nowadays, to be a software engineer you do not need a degree from a four-year college. So as long as you have some technical training and some companies you might get lucky and someone might give you a chance as a junior software engineer but with the training that I will receive from App Academy it would be more than enough to land a job in the software company. Because they do job placement, they help you with your resume. I go to class five days a week. And they teach you how to code, how to build problems, how to build projects build a portfolio that you can show once you're in the interview. How to

interview properly, what to say, what not to say. They coach you throughout the whole program.

>> Janet Weber: And it's a yearlong program?

>> Josue Cuellar: I have chosen to do the yearlong program just because I can't do full time just because I have to work. And in order to do the full time program, which is four, you can do it in four months or six months, you are not allowed to work during the time. Super demanding to be in the program.

>> Janet Weber: And then the goal is to get what kind of position at what kind of company?

>> Josue Cuellar: So at first I was kind of shooting low and that is the one thing that my sister's friend was saying which kind of resonated with me. I was planning on being a QA. And QA is a quality assurance engineer. Pretty much just test the products. So you would be testing somebody else's code. You'd be testing somebody else's product. And for me I was trying to get my foot in the door, but when I spoke to my sister's friend, she was like, "Why are you shooting so low?" She said, "Why would you shoot for \$100,000 when you could shoot for \$400,000?"

"In this industry," she said, "minorities are in demand. The only thing is you need to be able to present yourself with a little bit of experience. The only way you are going to get experience is by going to a boot camp or going to college." And she is like, "College is out of the picture because you said all you want to

do is software." She said, "If you want to get to where you want to get", and this is a person in the industry, she said, "Go to boot camp."

>> Janet Weber: Good advice.

>> Josue Cuellar: That is where I'm at now.

>> Janet Weber: It's very helpful to talk to people in the industry you want to get into.

>> Josue Cuellar: Definitely.

>> Janet Weber: What led you to talking to her?

>> Josue Cuellar: Like I said, I had a lot of interviews in engineering and stuff and I kept getting the same feedback. My sister was the one that told me to talk to her because I've talked to her a few times, her friend, and I know she worked at Facebook so I asked my sister if she could reach out and I could have a one-on-one with her. I reached out and I felt like that was probably one of the smartest decisions that I could ever make, because she did give me that advice. And now that I have taken that advice, I'm in this program and I'm a step closer to getting where I want to be.

>> Janet Weber: Good job reaching out for help and then doing an informational interview with someone in the field.

>> Josue Cuellar: That is another thing. I feel like when I was younger it was one of my weaknesses to ask for help and I don't know if it was just the way I was brought up, but I was

never used to asking for help always doing stuff on my own. Not only that just because it's kind of hard to ask your parents for help when they've never been in a position like that, so it's kind of tough being the first generation of a person going to school or to be in the position that I was trying to be in because I don't have anyone in my family that in software engineering, or has gone to college, or can help me with homework when I needed help with homework and stuff like that. It was little tough in that sense but I've learned to ask for help when I need it and I feel like that is a very important thing and it's not something that people should look at as a bad thing because I feel like everybody needs help and that everybody knows it at a certain point. There are those people that will point you in the right direction if you do ask the right questions.

>> Janet Weber: Yes. That leads me into my next question, which is, what were the other obstacles that you faced along your journey?

>> Josue Cuellar: I would say when I was having trouble with homework, when I first entered college; it was difficult for me to ask for help. I was never a great student, which I don't think helped. I think going from high school to college too where I wouldn't say they held your hand in high school but they paid a lot more attention to like if you didn't go to class they would call your house. College was different. If you didn't go to class, they didn't care. You already paid for the class so if you didn't go to class, you just didn't get

to class. It was one of those things where it was more like self-paced. So for someone that is not very in tune with school it was kind of hard for me to keep up with like certain assignments or like when I was falling behind to even say, "Hey, is there anything I could do to catch up?" Which I regret now but like I said, it's something that I worked on and it's kind of helping me now. Because now when I'm stuck on something I'm not afraid to ask for help, or ask the questions that I need to ask to understand what I'm trying to work on.

>> Janet Weber: Yes, I think that is an important point because when I am in meetings with administrators with the college, they feel frustrated because there is all these research for students and they're not doing well and most of the administrators understand it, but some of the administrators, staff, faculty don't understand that it's not easy to ask for help.

>> Josue Cuellar: Right. For me it was hard. I can only imagine how it is for other people with disabilities, or people that are not as easy to talk to, or aren't as shy but I think it was more like I was not used to asking for help so -

>> Janet Weber: And didn't know the world you were in.

>> Josue Cuellar: Exactly. And I feel like if maybe I wasn't like that when I first started in school I probably would have pursued it, graduated and taken a different route. But I

don't regret the route that I've taken. I'm on the right path to where I want to be, like I said, and I learned a lot. It's made me the person I am today.

>> Janet Weber: What have you learned?

>> Josue Cuellar: Like I said, I've learned to ask for help. I've learned how to build web pages. I've learned two different languages now. I will be learning another language soon, maybe within the next three weeks. Like I said, I'm on the right path to where I want to be. I'm networking with people at work now. It's getting a little easier for me to make those right connections that I need to make. Set me in the job that I want to be.

>> Janet Weber: Good job. Now I'm going to ask: What advice would you give your younger self? Let's say your 18 year old self.

>> Josue Cuellar: I would say don't be afraid to try and do things just because you think something is hard. Maybe it is hard, but good things don't come easy. You know if you work hard for something, the end goal is so satisfying. And if you put in the work you will see the result.

>> Janet Weber: And don't feel shy to try it.

>> Josue Cuellar: Right. Exactly. So that is one thing that I'm learning too. I would say as I get older or more mature to try new things. It's not a bad thing. When I say try new things, I mean healthy things. Things that

are good or benefit you. That could be anything. New sports, new music, new food, which is something that me and Bianca love. We have a passion for food. So we like trying all types of food from all different types of countries and all different types of proteins from vegan to vegetarian to steak, chicken, Greek, to Mexican, to Indian, to Malaysian, to Thai, to Nepalese. I feel like the first time we tried - well I tried Nepalese food was with you.

>> Janet Weber: Um-hmm.

>> Josue Cuellar: Just don't be afraid.

>> Janet Weber: Good advice. Put yourself out there.

>> Josue Cuellar: Definitely. Because you will never know what you are going to learn and you never know who you are going to meet.

>> Janet Weber: Okay. My last question is, what advice would you give to students that are listening now on their own journeys, which might be the same as you would have given yourself but might also be different?

>> Josue Cuellar: Don't be afraid to ask for help. That would be one of my biggest advice that I could give to students that are listening. Don't be afraid to ask for help. You never know who you are going to meet along your journey or counselor-wise. Teacher-wise. It could be mentors. I know you and Leanne are huge mentors for Bianca, which I am really glad

that she met you guys because her journey, when she met you, has changed her life and just having you guys as mentors and counselors. Another one would be if college doesn't work out for you there is always plan B. I would say always have a plan B. Just because college didn't work out, doesn't mean it's the end for you, and it doesn't mean you can't reach your end goal at the end.

>> Janet Weber: Okay that leads me to one more question.

>> Josue Cuellar: Okay.

>> Janet Weber: What was it that kept you determined through it all?

>> Josue Cuellar: I think what kept me determined always was, I always wanted more in life. And I knew that if I wanted more it was something that had to come from me. If I ever got comfortable at where I was at, I would never want more and I would never reach the goal that I always wanted. If let's say you're working at a coffee shop. Say the coffee shop is a stepping-stone to getting where you're going to get. Don't get comfortable at the coffee shop. Always want more for yourself. And always want more for your future. If you remember that you can always do more and you can always achieve what you want, I feel like will always feel determined and never settle for less.

>> Janet Weber: I can see that right now in you like I can imagine you in the restaurant

working, doing a good job, enjoying it, but knowing you wanted more.

>> Josue Cuellar: Yes, definitely.

>> Janet Weber: And then getting the job at Apple, which is a great job. Doing your best there and wanting more and now you are there connecting with engineers there and --

>> Josue Cuellar: And I'm just staying determined. Like I started at Apple, I knew I wanted to get my foot in the door but I still stay determined. I don't want to stay where I'm at. I started as a receiver. Now I'm a manager in that department. Still I know it's a great position to have as a manager, I still want more. I'm still determined to get where I want to get. So, I'm still determined for that angle.

>> Janet Weber: It's like you were patient and determined at the same time.

>> Josue Cuellar: Correct.

>> Janet Weber: I like that. That sounds like a good recipe.

>> Josue Cuellar: Patient and determined.

>> Janet Weber: Okay. On that note, thank you for joining me today and telling me about that journey. I learned a lot about you today.

>> Josue Cuellar: You did.

>> Janet Weber: Anything else you would want to say?

>> Josue Cuellar: The journey sometimes is short. And I don't mean short in the manner of like education wise or getting to your end goal. You might graduate doing what you want and something might not work out for you and it's okay. There is always something else. I know a lot of people that have graduated and they are doing medicine and they go into medicine and they do a total 180 and now they are in technology. Just because one career didn't work out, there is many careers out there. Networking is probably the one of the best things you can do.

>> Janet Weber: I agree. Talking to people and being open to other opportunities.

>> Josue Cuellar: And then being open to criticism and being open to other people's opinions as well.

>> Janet Weber: I like it. So being curious, being open to opportunities and listening to others, even if it's constructive criticism.

>> Josue Cuellar: Constructive criticism can be sometimes good criticism as well.

>> Janet Weber: I like it. Thank you.

>> Josue Cuellar: Thank you very much, Janet. I appreciate it.