

The Never Ending Cycle

I moved to Arizona in 1998. What I remember most was the intense arguments from both "sides." Personally I didn't have that passionate of an opinion either way. While I believed minimum wage was too little for anyone to actually live on, I earned above minimum wage before I even graduated from high school.

Still, I started at minimum wage and worked my way up. I was also fortunate enough to work for employers interested in retaining employees enough to give them raises.

I remember in 1992 when the minimum wage increased from \$3.36 to \$3.65. Several things happened that both impacted me enough to remember the whole minimum wage argument, as well as affected how I see the minimum wage debate.

First, as I said, I had started working for minimum wage but had worked hard to receive raises to \$3.75 per hour. I worked for several years in a restaurant as the head cashier, the head hostess, part-time secretary and certified trainer of new cashiers and hostesses. However, once the minimum wage was increased, I only made \$0.10 more per hour than a high school student with no experience earning extra money on the weekends.

We all know those earning minimum wage get an automatic pay increase and everyone else just stays where they are. It is usually argued by employers that they are unable to give "deserved" raises to their other employees because they are forced to give raises to those at wage. For ethical employers, that is probably a legitimate argument.

Second, as the restaurant was corporately owned, the night before the minimum wage law went into effect, we were told to exchange the menus for new ones. The new menus looked exactly like the old ones except most items had been increased by about \$0.25. We were instructed that if any customers questioned "a price increase" we were to advise them that there had been no price increase and that they must be mistaken about the prices.

These memories came back to me when Arizona experienced the minimum wage debate over the last two years. Because of my experiences I can see both sides of the argument - though I still supported and voted for the increase.

Then today, I went to my dry cleaners. Though it's called \$1.50 Cleaners, their price has been \$1.75 for a couple of years. I remember when they increased but I really don't remember if they gave a reason or not. Now they have increased their price to \$1.95 and have placed a note on the door blaming the minimum wage increase.

This is what kills me. If everyone raised their prices to accommodate an increase in minimum wage, how are we helping the poor? It's just an increase in money going in and out for the same things. There is NO additional money this way.

Do people deserve "just" wages for "honest" work? Without a doubt. But unfortunately, despite what many seem to believe, ethics and morality cannot be legislated... though it could be taught....

About the Author

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