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This month we are honoring Sanitation and Recycling Workers in the community. Akellz and Liz of The Be Kind Crew™ sat down with Noah Lopez of Waste Management for an interview.

Find out his journey and what it means to him to Be Kind and to Be Responsible.



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Introduction:

This month is dedicated to honoring sanitation and recycling workers nationwide for the important work they do in our communities. Let's meet Noah from Waste Management!

Tell us about yourself.

My name is Noah Lopez. I've been in Waste Management for about 14 years Just recently got into the recycle vision about 2 years ago. I got introduced to the family business. My dad has been in the business for about 44 years, my brothers been doing it for about 26 years.

How long have you been doing "this" overall?

Total for about almost.... 20 years.

What would you say has been the most rewarding thing about what you do so far?

Seeing the development of the recycle division. It wasn't in planning before, it's something that's new in the business and seeing the steps that it's taking. Just what people know as "cardboard" or "aluminum" cans that actually goes in e-waste for computers and compost. They are trying to new ways to actually recycle more of what you see of "waste." So just not common waste of what you see in the trash, they are trying to break it down and use it in our communities.



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It seems like a HUGE undertaking to organize this whole thing, what would you say is the most “challenging” part of working at Waste Management?

Umm, again...it's the changes. I want to say two times a year, there is a new development coming over to us trying a new process. Either if it's going from paper to electronics, and getting rid of that waste. AS a company, being old school drivers and even the new drivers (that are better with technology), its a challenge to many of our team workers, they haven't even seen a tablet before. Simple things like that, just seeing the development of our drivers being able to join the workforce and do that with us.

What would you say has been one of the most memorable moments of you working so far. What would you say has been a “highlight” of your time here at Waste Management?

The company coming together to support one another. The company is like a big family (although not related), but when one of us is in trouble, its about us coming together and supporting one another.

What does the word Responsible mean to you? Everyone has a different definition, but if you had a child next to you, what would you tell them that it means?

Uh...that's a good question! I mean, for us, I would say safety! Responsible and safety: it starts WITH US first. From coming to work, it could literally be just being well rested to actually starting our unit or (taking care of) our equipment. It takes a big responsibility leaving the yard knowing it's safe for ourselves AND the community. It could be very dangerous with garbage trucks and safety, so I think “safety.”



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How is being responsible applicable (used) in your line of work?

If you see it, say something about it. Related to the recycle business, there is a lot of illegal dumping in waste. Dealing with that aspect with our customers. Just informing them and giving them that knowledge, what to recycle and what not. Eliminate as much as possible.

How can you relate recycling to BE RESPONSIBLE?

Following thru the process. You can have the recycle bins in the house, you can even have the city recycling come find you. It's that one step, you know where it belongs, but it's actually GETTING IT THERE. It's a discipline. Follow thru the process, it's the best way I can explain that.

Has there even been an instance where things have gone "sour." Where something happened on accident or because someone forgot to be responsible?

Through the business, not particularly our fill, but I've seen it in other companies. I've seen it on the news, if you've actually looked on the news...protocols or safety protocols. There of careless practices that have resulted in deaths in the companies. just simple things like "working in the truck when the truck is running", or "even mechanical work", or "mechanics don't work alone." Simple things that in the past, have been overlooked, but have definitely accounted for deaths in the company.



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Do you breathe in things? do chemicals get on you? What would you say are the hazards out there?

Fatigue, actually. Going back to responsibility and safety, Just normal actions of going out there unrested...you'd be surprised of nodding your head or not paying attention, then there's a little kid crossing the street or with a ball. It could be something like that where there is just a little responsibility and then something tragic like that could happen.

Kids learn lots of skills in school. What would you say is a life skill that everyone should have when they go out into the "real world"?

Teamwork, honestly. Don't do everything by yourself. With this company or any company, it takes teamwork to get the job done, you know? We are just a small gear in this whole thing. If you could realize this at a young age, being able to rely on other people...things will go a lot smoother.

There is always someone we look up to that inspires us to get to the "next level," whether it be someone related or a celebrity. Who would you say that has been for you?

My dad. He's won numerous awards for safety. Being safe is a big accomplishment. Going home and MAKING IT HOME everyday. That's big accomplishment: to come to work.



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Do you have any kids?

4 kids. 2 Boys and 2 girls. One is in 2nd grade, one is a freshman in high school, and two of them are in college.

Do you have a favorite hobby?

Honestly just spending time with my family. For future planning and vacation, their happiness means a lot to me...so honestly a lot of vacation planning. Being prepared, it's always good to be prepared. Some people don't see enjoyment in it, but for me...it's very rewarding.

Preparation is key. Do you have any words on preparation and being more organized as a person, as student, or just planning for the future? How do you go about doing that?

I think it's your upbringing. Falling from my dad to my parents, seeing where I'm at right now, and looking at the future with my kids. Trying to prepare my kids for the future. Again with music, bringing it to my personal life, always asking the questions: KNOWLEDGE IS KEY! The more knowledge I get, the more they can get. That's preparing. You can never get enough knowledge in anything.



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**What do you do when you hit a “bump?” When things don’t go as expected: the unplanned events?
What do you do to remain optimistic, even in worse case scenarios/situations?**

GO BACK TO BASICS! Take some time and think about the situation. Don’t act on anger or fear, just go back to the basic.

What are “The Basics?”

Even just asking this question to a friend or a family member, “why this happened?” or “what can happen?” Just look at the outcome. Scenarios. Look at the situation from outside the box. Don’t always react from anger or fear. Even if it’s Church, from a kid, find your “safety net” (supporting community/people who support you), and work from there.

Everyone has goals...at the end of 5-10 years, what would you hope to accomplish personally?

I think like any other working American, PAY OFF MY HOUSE! Going back to basics there: have good family values, see my kids grow up, be somewhat successful, and the things I’m doing now will fall onto them.

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Do you have any words of wisdom for the future generation?

TAKE INITIATIVE. It starts with us. The kids and the next generation. Do something and you'll get something out of it. I think it starts at a young age. Do something and you'll MAKE A DIFFERENCE.



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