

# Ex-Amazon worker: I was fired for picking too slow

By our reporters  
10 June 2017

*A former Amazon worker submitted the following response to the International Amazon Workers Voice article from May 26, "Amazon workers worldwide denounce dictatorial working conditions." The former worker said, "Every quote in the article is accurate." The ex-worker gave the IAWV permission to post his comment from Reddit.*

I worked at an Amazon fulfillment center, and yes the job is terrible and soul crushing, but it was about the same as other big factory/warehouse jobs I've had and have heard about.

Amazon *does* seem to be at least a bit worse than other places, and I believe it's because they are a tech company. As a company that has only existed in the computer/internet age, they have from their inception been able to keep metrics on every single aspect of their business. Productivity optimization has always been a thing with business, but computers allow (and condition) you to keep track of everything and anything and optimize it all down to the nano-second, millimeter, pixel, thousandth of a cent, etc.

Being a worker at Amazon is perfectly summed up by this quote in the article:

"We are not robots to just look at the shelves."

Because as far as Amazon Inc. is concerned, every human employed by them is essentially an organic robot. They have determined the exact amount of time every task should take, regardless of which particular organic robot is doing the task, and if a piece of machinery doesn't do the job exactly as you expect it to you scrap it and get a replacement machine.

As an example, for a time I was a picker: meaning I stood in one place while actual robots drove 6.5 ft. tall shelves to me one at a time, then a screen told me which item to pick and from which section of the shelf, then I grab it, scan it, place it in the correct bucket

(from 3 to 10 buckets), and push the light over the bucket. Amazon decided that this whole process should take exactly nine seconds.

If your average pick time was consistently over nine seconds, they'd try to train you a couple times then eventually let you go. This is why I was fired. My manager came to me a couple times to try to show me how to pick faster; he never gave me new information or new techniques, he just moved faster than me. He never acknowledged the fact that I had to do the same task for ten hours straight (btw, shifts are always ten hours) while he only picked for a couple minutes a day, nor did he acknowledge the fact that he was *way* shorter than me so he could reach the lower shelves (they start at your feet) without bending over as much as me which was killing my back.

Oh, also, whatever speed they had previously decided was the exact perfect speed for an organic robot to operate at, they would just make it quicker whenever they wanted productivity to go up without having to pay for more facilities/equipment.

*Current and former Amazon workers: Submit your Amazon horror stories by signing-up for the International Amazon Workers Voice newsletter below and explain your story in the comments field. "Like" our page on Facebook and share with your co-workers.*

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