##### [00:00:00.000] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Today on Harper Talks, I'm excited to speak with Luigi De Matteo. He is a 2004 graduate of Harper College and is a District Manager for Jules Osco. Luigi joined me in the Harper Media Lab in the West Wing of Building D. Thanks for being here.

##### [00:00:21.310] - Luigi De Matteo

Well, thank you, Brian. Nice meeting you.

##### [00:00:22.760] - Brian Shelton

Nice to meet you as well. I saw you earlier before you came down. You were down by the Starbucks on campus, and you were mentoring some students. What was that all about? What are you doing?

##### [00:00:32.240] - Luigi De Matteo

I'm volunteering for Harper College as an alumni. And what happened is I used to do actually this. There used to be a program called, I believe, Connections Through the International Program here. I was assigned two students while I was attending school here. I graduated and so forth. I actually got assigned this territory for Jewel Osco working here, District 2, we call it. I stopped by and I said, Hey, are you looking for any volunteers to help our international students here? I was meeting up with two ladies from Japan that they attend harper, ESL classes, English, second language.

##### [00:01:17.650] - Brian Shelton

How's that going? Is that fun for you?

##### [00:01:18.880] - Luigi De Matteo

It's fun. They actually showed up, so I guess I'm doing good.

##### [00:01:24.550] - Brian Shelton

It's always good when they show up.

##### [00:01:28.250] - Luigi De Matteo

It's a conversation. Trying to make sure that they feel comfortable, but what I like is offering myself to folks that they really need. Brian, they're honest. They're honest saying, Hey, I'm here for a conversation, trying to get that English out of them. If they showed up again, that means that we're doing something good.

##### [00:01:50.430] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, that's fantastic. I was going to ask about this later, but why is that important to you? Why is it important to you to volunteer to do that?

##### [00:01:56.430] - Luigi De Matteo

It's important because when I came 24 years ago, English was my second language. There is a barrier. It's a cultural barrier where you really you want to speak, in my case, Italian, but really you don't have folks speaking Italian and you're pushed to speak English, and you wish you have somebody there helping you, helping you just communicate, helping you how to do things, where do you go, and so forth. It's interesting how we think that it's easy, but really it's not. Being at Jewel Osco working, so I'm blessed that I have some folks from Ukraine. One of the guys were telling me, I go to a Ukraine bank because it's easy for me, because I can speak Ukraine. I'm like, Okay, well, I'm going to push you now to discover more because your English is good. It's just that I think sometimes it's fear, but we have to get over with the fear and discover what's out there.

##### [00:03:02.030] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, it's so hard, too, especially when you're trying to learn a language, you're so nervous and so self-conscious about it.

##### [00:03:07.860] - Luigi De Matteo

That's what it is. You're nervous, you're concerned, How is my English? How am I going to say this word? Or How am I going to act? Or what is the perception from the other side?

##### [00:03:18.630] - Brian Shelton

I have basic French, but I refuse to speak it to anyone. I was at an event in New York, and I'm sitting next to this couple from France, and they're asking me questions because they needed help with their English. I'm just like, I am not speaking French to you. But I need to do that. I need to get into a conversational situation.

##### [00:03:35.480] - Luigi De Matteo

That's why I offer myself.

##### [00:03:37.190] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. It's great that you do that. You mentioned to us you come to us by way of Italy. What was behind your decision to come to the US and ultimately, after college?

##### [00:03:47.750] - Luigi De Matteo

It was a matter of after I attended four-year college there, I had to serve the army. It was mandatory at that time. After that, I decided, Let me go in the United States and see what's available for me. I came here, and of course, I needed a job. I will bring up Jewel because they had a big sign now hiring. I walked there and they got me in. I started part-time. But also the fact that I knew I needed to go someplace for my English, but also a US education. Actually, it was interesting that trying to get my college credits from Italy to here, I was almost told, Yeah, we'll get half of it, but you need to advance through the US education system.

##### [00:04:45.770] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, I was going to ask you about that. How did that differing education system work for you? How did you square that? How did you make that work?

##### [00:04:52.610] - Luigi De Matteo

Actually, I did my own translations and my own paperwork and all that. Actually, it was via Harper that I presented some of it, and they accepted some of the credit classes. And classes match. It's just about where do you want to study, if you were studying the right thing, like here. We don't have a credit system as the US. It's based on numbers. Here, it's based on so many classes, so many credits. You need 60 hours or 120 hours to graduate. Yeah, but I made it happen after ESL classes. Then I took my regular credit classes and moved on. It was a matter of a job. Going back to the first question, why did I come here? It was a matter of finding a job, a future for myself. Not easy. You're coming in a place where you don't know people.

##### [00:05:47.250] - Brian Shelton

Did you come here alone?

##### [00:05:48.440] - Luigi De Matteo

Alone.

##### [00:05:48.900] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Oh, that had to be scary.

##### [00:05:51.370] - Luigi De Matteo

And that's why, actually, I'm grateful about Jewel because I did not have a car. I had to walk. And that's why then when you also asked me question, why do you volunteer and why am I doing this? It's because I believe that everybody has something good to offer. I was grateful for the people that helped me, pushed me.

##### [00:06:12.500] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, you got to give back, right?

##### [00:06:14.480] - Luigi De Matteo

Yeah, that's what it is. But I moved on and I was able to find a job. I was able to move with my education.

##### [00:06:23.980] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, that's fantastic. Did you feel like there weren't opportunities for you in Italy? Is that why you-

##### [00:06:28.220] - Luigi De Matteo

They were not, actually, because I come from the Southern part of Italy, near Naples, and at that time, they were not. You graduate from college and you're actually waiting, waiting, waiting for something to open.

##### [00:06:43.600] - Brian Shelton

Is that still the case today?

##### [00:06:45.340] - Luigi De Matteo

Still today, not as bad as it used to be.

##### [00:06:48.560] - Brian Shelton

I know there's a population decline.

##### [00:06:50.750] - Luigi De Matteo

Yes, but it's not as easy. Not as easy.

##### [00:06:55.470] - Brian Shelton

It had to be scary coming to the United States and not really speaking the language and coming alone. I mean, that's very brave of you. I admire that very much.

##### [00:07:04.810] - Luigi De Matteo

Well, thank you. And I guess, Harper helped out, too.

##### [00:07:07.800] - Brian Shelton

I guess so, yeah. We did a good job. We did a good job. So clearly, things worked out for you. You got an AA from Harper, right?

##### [00:07:16.060] - Luigi De Matteo

Correct.

##### [00:07:16.160] - Brian Shelton

You got a B. A. From Northern Illinois University.

##### [00:07:18.390] - Luigi De Matteo

Correct.

##### [00:07:19.140] - Brian Shelton

And then you got an MBA.

##### [00:07:20.590] - Luigi De Matteo

Northeastern.

##### [00:07:21.730] - Brian Shelton

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I miss Northeastern?

##### [00:07:23.690] - Luigi De Matteo

Northeastern, Illinois. Yeah.

##### [00:07:25.180] - Brian Shelton

Okay. And the MBA, right? So that's coming a long way from taking English as a second language.

##### [00:07:31.010] - Luigi De Matteo

Actually, I did not picture myself making it here at Harper in the beginning. Brian, I was a part-time student. I was just taking it easy. Work was number one, school was second. But when that day came that I got that certificate, I'm like, certificate with the associate. I'm like, Wow, okay, I made it. Actually, I'm grateful that a store director told me, You're not stopping. You're not moving to the next level. I'm like, What? And yeah, this person pushed me further, and I went to Northeastern then.

##### [00:08:08.540] - Brian Shelton

Northeastern, okay.

##### [00:08:08.920] - Luigi De Matteo

Actually, I used all the 60 credit hours from Harper, and they all transferred, and I just moved on with my business.

##### [00:08:15.890] - Brian Shelton

Yes. So it was somebody you were working with who was pushing you to do your education?

##### [00:08:18.860] - Luigi De Matteo

I was a daily manager at that time, and for Jewel, and the store director was proud of me that I was moving along. I was moving along.

##### [00:08:28.950] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. It's so...You can't doubt that, and people either take it for granted or don't, but you got to have somebody who believes in you. If somebody believes in you and someone gives you that little push and that little extra, it makes a huge It's a huge difference, right? Yeah, huge difference. I was going to ask you, maybe this... I talked about this already, but you're an Italian-American immigrant, right? What aspects of your background and experience do you believe contributed to your drive for success? Is there Is there something about the nature of being an immigrant that pushes you to drive to succeed, or is it just you, innately?

##### [00:09:07.960] - Luigi De Matteo

I guess everybody. Everybody has a drive. I believe in that. Everybody has a drive. Of course, as somebody coming from a different country to a different country, you got to push yourself to do more because you want to better yourself. But I interview a lot of folks also here now for Jewel Osco, and I think it's everybody. It's just a matter of the luck that you have in finding people that believe in you because everybody can do everything. It's a matter of also make that person believe, believe that, Hey, you can do this. You got this. Usually, we all get stuck in our comfort zone, but it's okay to go to the discomfort. For me, I guess I had to do it. I did not know what I was up for. Is it easy? No, I'm going to say that it's not. Financially, emotionally, and other, the differences of culture. But when I think back, it's a learning process, and actually a good learning process, knowing, like you were saying about your French, that you know French, but you were hesitant to speak French. This one here, it's the same. That plus more, and just that push.

##### [00:10:39.360] - Brian Shelton

Got to push, too. Tell me a little bit about your career. You worked your way up through this I mean, Jewel Osco is a very large grocery store chain and company. How did you work your way up through that?

##### [00:10:49.690] - Luigi De Matteo

I started part-time in the deli department, and then moved up full-time. Then they put you in a training program to become a shop manager, department manager. Oh, okay. Then after that, I guess if you do good, and I was blessed. Once again, I had a district manager that identified something in me. You were asked to, Hey, interview for a store management training program. And now you are now learning managing a store. And while on one side we can say managing a store, what is that about? I'm actually proud of the fact that managing a store is not only store operations, but you deal with people, you deal with customers, you deal with associates, you deal with operations, inputs, outputs. It's a broader vision of managing a company day by day, day by day. I made it to an assistant. After that, I had a chance to become an Opps specialist. So now you're specialized in one one particular section of a shop, and they assigned me, at that time, was around 60 to 70 stores. Then I got assigned to 100, and then total division. And then after that, cycled back for store operations, store director, several locations. Then I had a chance to bid on this job, district manager.

##### [00:12:24.350] - Brian Shelton

Be back in the area that you want to be in.

##### [00:12:26.050] - Luigi De Matteo

Then they assigned me here in this territory. I have from Arlington Heights all the way to Antioch. Wow. Antioch to Woodstock. Then I come Algonquin, Palatine, Hoffman Estates. That's why then I decided, Hey, I'm back to Harper College territory, and I'm going to offer myself back.

##### [00:12:46.370] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. It's great to have you here. It sounds like the company really believes in professional development of its employees.

##### [00:12:51.270] - Luigi De Matteo

They do. Brian, I will actually... Yes, the company does a good job. We are centralized as far as we belong to Albertson's companies. But the beauty of Jewel Osco is they believe in the community, they're local, and also the development of the people. We have internal training, internal classes, and also mentorship. If we see potentials in our folks, they can advance. In fact, I did not. If you look at my resume, I see a Jewel. But in the years that I've been with Jewel, I was able to move in various positions. There was no need for me to be switching jobs. Like nowadays, we look at somebody saying, Hey, why are you stuck in one place? Again, the company, they see potential, they take care of the people.

##### [00:13:46.850] - Brian Shelton

I've just never really thought about working at the grocery store in that manner. You just probably look at some clerks throwing stuff on the shelves, of which that's what it is.

##### [00:13:59.330] - Luigi De Matteo

Okay, open cans on the shelves and sell the goods, but there is more. There's a lot more to it. There is more.

##### [00:14:06.410] - Brian Shelton

It's great that someone coming in there starting as somebody collecting carts can work their way up to being a district manager.

##### [00:14:12.400] - Luigi De Matteo

Actually, I have to say our leadership The beauty of our company, too, they all come from frontline operations. Our President, he was collecting carts. That's how he started.

##### [00:14:24.860] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, you got to know how it works.

##### [00:14:25.660] - Luigi De Matteo

My boss, my vice President, yes. And so that's the beauty of it, too, for frontline all the way up.

##### [00:14:31.320] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. I love it. So I ask everybody who comes in for the show to tell me what advice you would give for Harper students. What would you tell them if he could sit with all of them?

##### [00:14:42.160] - Luigi De Matteo

When I was here at Harper, I, as a student, I always looked at it, and I'm going to be honest as far as, Oh, my gosh, I got to take this class. I have quizzes, I have tests. I'm like, I'm done. I don't want to do this anymore. Now, when I ...And your goal is you got to get that associate because, hey, you're paying and you're here, you got to get it. Looking now when I think and I have to give an advice, take advantage of Harper College. Take advantage of the fact that it's a reputable school in the community that will help you move forward, will give you the foundation to then succeed. At that time, we just had books, and you read all these books, and you don't know if you're going to apply all this stuff. Brian, I'm going to say that, and actually, I was with Shannon. We were talking about we had that Professional Leadership Dinner, and I was part of it, and I'm glad that Shannon invited me. I was sharing to some of the students saying, Hey, all the stuff that you study, I apply it every day.

##### [00:15:59.900] - Luigi De Matteo

Break even point and graph this, fixed cost, variable cost. Now, I'm talking business, but my table was business. They were looking at me, they were smiling. I'm like, Yeah, you don't think in it now, but take advantage. One day you're going to apply it. That's right. I would strongly suggest that, but I also have to say, use all the services available. Use all the services available. Sometimes we just come, study, go home, that's it. Or we just think that what is the campus offering? Ask questions, demand, or see what's going on. I know it's a small campus, but really it's not a small campus. It's what the student makes out of this college.

##### [00:16:45.040] - Brian Shelton

Tell me about that dinner real quick. How was that? Tell me what happened there.

##### [00:16:50.450] - Luigi De Matteo

The dinner was actually a nice event. I guess this was the first time for me. It was a matter of alumni offering their time to students, that they were lucky that they were able to attend this dinner. The process is that students are there to network and ask questions. The students were coming to me with their little business cards that Harper had them do it. They were asked questions like, Okay, what do you do? And What's your work? What's your style life? And what should I be prepared for? And I was making them feel comfortable, too. It was a great experience for the Harper students to really connect to the outside world, where you really don't have that in all colleges. And I was telling Shannon, I was so proud of the fact that these folks were able to just experience in a cold matter. Why do I say cold matter? It's like, you don't know me. I didn't know you, but we were chatting today. Exactly. That's what the students were pushed because that's the real world. But what a beauty to have somebody to tell you right there for free.

##### [00:18:17.430] - Brian Shelton

Yeah.

##### [00:18:17.890] - Luigi De Matteo

You get a dinner out of it, too. I was like, Oh, gosh, these folks got a dinner here, too. It was beautiful. For Harper College to offer that to the students, I wish that everybody body lines up, that they will say, Hey, I know it's limited, but that there is more demand for that.

##### [00:18:36.540] - Brian Shelton

What a great opportunity for people to be able to take advantage of.

##### [00:18:39.000] - Luigi De Matteo

Absolutely.

##### [00:18:39.430] - Brian Shelton

Well, thank you for doing that.

##### [00:18:40.340] - Luigi De Matteo

No problem.

##### [00:18:41.510] - Brian Shelton

You get home at all? You get back to Italy?

##### [00:18:43.600] - Luigi De Matteo

Once every two years, yes. My parents live there. I have a brother there. It's always good to keep myself updated, too.

##### [00:18:53.950] - Brian Shelton

I've only been Italy once. I was in Torino two years ago. It was really beautiful up there, but I haven't been south.

##### [00:19:00.590] - Luigi De Matteo

It's a great place to go for a vacation and living there, too. We have a lot of US citizens that go there as a retirement and so forth. Yes.

##### [00:19:10.690] - Brian Shelton

All right. Well, thanks so much for being here. I appreciate it.

##### [00:19:12.600] - Luigi De Matteo

No problem. Really enjoyed talking to you. No problem. Thank you. Yes, you invited me here.

##### [00:19:15.480] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Keep working with the students. I really appreciate that. It's an awesome opportunity for them. Thank you. That's great. Luigi De Matteo is a Harper College graduate, a district Manager for Jewel Osco, and a champion for Harper College. If you're enjoying Harper Talks, please subscribe. And while you're at it, rate and review us so that others might find us. Harper Talks is a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. This episode was edited by Coby Pozo. Our online content producer is Matt Byrne. Our theme music was created by Aiden Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.