

Briefly Noted

by
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Service Stars

The greeting was enthusiastic: "Good morning!" Hardly what I expected to hear as I stepped onto the Number 6 bus, eastbound on Edmonton's Whyte Avenue.

As I took my place a few rows from the front of the bus, I wondered about what I had just experienced. Instead of reading the magazine that I had in my briefcase, I decided to watch and listen as my journey began.

At every stop it was the same: a friendly greeting to those entering the bus. The warmest welcomes were reserved for the youngest of the driver's riders, preschoolers accompanying their mothers. He greeted some passengers – regulars on the route, I assume – by name. He inquired about their health, what was happening in their lives, and about family members. The driver seemed genuinely interested in the riders and their replies.

Every time a passenger exited the bus, the driver waved and thanked them for riding.

When the bus reached my stop, another passenger and I stepped off. We both turned left, walking in the same direction as the bus was travelling. Having picked up people who had been waiting at that stop, the bus continued along its route. As it passed us, the driver beeped his horn and waved.

The lesson learned from the driver of the Number 6 bus: no matter how mundane or routine the task, one can always bring a little daily sunshine to customers with a smile, a friendly greeting, or a thank you...better yet, with all three.

Nelson Scott offers several customer service presentations, including **Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Loyal Customers; Remembering What Your Mother Taught You About Customer Service; Exceptional Service** (developed by Service Quality Institute); and **STAR Service** (from the Vital Learning Corporation).



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Nelson's Point of View

Surprise! Money just doesn't do it

While in Philadelphia last fall, I came across this headline in the November 2, 2006 issue of USA Today:

"Bonuses don't cut turnover for TSA"

The article describes how the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) had attempted to reduce turnover by introducing "retention bonuses" for airport screeners. Improved retention would mean shorter lines at airports and more experienced screeners who, the article says, are "better at finding weapons at checkpoints".

As reflected in the headline, the initiative appears to have had no effect. Despite extra payments of \$500 to \$1,000, the turnover rate remained unchanged at 19.9 per cent, one of the highest in the American government.

Once again, here is evidence that money alone does not buy commitment, even among people for whom \$500 to \$1,000 is a significant boost to an average annual income of \$30,000.

To its credit, the agency appears to understand that more is needed and is taking other steps to improve retention. According to the article, TSA plans to create screener jobs with higher salaries. These screeners will focus on detecting bombs and identifying suspicious passengers. Gale Rosside, a TSA associate administrator, is quoted as saying that this change could upgrade screening "from a dead-end job to an occupation where (screeners) can see years of opportunity".

Will it help? Perhaps. But when it comes to reducing turnover, there is a limit to what can be done on an organization-wide basis. The real battle against turnover is not one to be won at the boardroom table

or in corporate offices. People in senior positions are limited in what they are able to do. They may authorize bonuses or create new career opportunities, but they have little influence over employees' daily, on-the-job lives.

The people who can do the most to reduce turnover and retain staff in any organization are the employees' immediate supervisors. More than anyone else, supervisors create the climate of the workplace and influence staff morale.

When supervisors manage through means such as intimidation, compliance, and pettiness when applying company policies, their departments are characterized by unhappy, disengaged employees and higher attrition rates.

On the other hand, supervisors who respect staff, keep them informed, and express appreciation for their contributions are more likely to lead a workforce made up of individuals who are committed to the organization and less likely to leave.

What was missing from the *USA Today* article was a description of what the TSA is doing to prepare supervisors to provide the leadership that builds commitment. Maybe this is because there was nothing to report. Unfortunately, until this missing piece is added to the story, the tale of high turnover at TSA – or in any other organization, for that matter – will continue to be there to be told.

Nelson's affiliation with the Vital Learning Corporation means that he can offer clients classroom and on-line training that develops leadership and communication skills which enable those in supervisory positions to build commitment within the workplace. One of the newest modules in the Supervision Series is **Retaining Winning Talent**.

Question shows you're on the customer's side

With a single question, you can defuse a complaining customer's anger, begin to resolve the problem, and start the process of rebuilding your relationship with this customer. Here's how to do it:

First, allow time for the customer to express frustration. Then, respond with a question: "What would we need to do to make things better?" These words defuse anger by demonstrating your willing-

ness to resolve the problem, and to do so on the customer's terms.

Listen to the customer's request. Can you do that? Most requests will be reasonable. Often, what the customer wants is less than you were prepared to do. If the request is more than you are willing to do, you have a base from which to negotiate a more acceptable solution.

Quote of the Month

"I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."

— Charles Schwab

Where is Nelson?

Monday, February 4

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Essential Skills of Leadership*

Thursday, February 7

North Central Teachers' Convention (Edmonton, AB)

- Fire the Employee of the Month

Monday, February 11

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Essential Skills of Leadership*

Friday, February 15

Calgary City Teachers' Convention (Calgary, AB)

- Oops! Free Hiring
- Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Allies
- Productive Meetings in Less Time

Thursday, February 21

Palliser Teachers' Convention (Calgary, AB)

- Productive Meetings in Less Time
- Improving Staff Retention Without Spending Buckets of Money

* Designates a module from the Vital Learning Corporation's Leadership Series.

Nelson Scott is available to speak at conferences or conventions, or for on-site training. Presentations will be customized to meet your organization's goals, participants' learning needs, and to fit the available time. To contact Nelson, phone (780) 433-1443 or e-mail nmscott@telus.net.

Staff Recognition Ideas

- When a staff member has done a good job on a project, present her with a list of potential projects and allow her to select which one she would like to tackle next.
- Collect testimonials from co-workers and present them to an employee on the anniversary of the date on which he first came to work for the organization.
- At the beginning of the week, make a list of the staff who you supervise (or co-workers, if you are not a supervisor). After you have recognized a staff member for doing a job well, check off his or her name. Your goal is that by week's end to have placed a check mark next to every name.

The Question Doctor

The Cure for the Common Interview Question

Common Question: How important do you feel confidentiality will be in this position?

I don't know what position you are filling, but I can tell you that confidentiality is important. And so will the candidates. If confidentiality wasn't important, why would you even ask the question?

It will be easy for the candidate to respond that, "I believe that confidentiality is very important", before launching into a well-choreographed response, highlighting a belief in the overall importance of respecting confidentiality with a commitment to do just that.

Better Question: How would you deal with confidential information?

This question is a step – albeit a tiny step – beyond the original question: from asking for a statement about the importance of confidentiality to a description of action that the candidate may take when dealing with confidential information.

The question itself signals to the candidate how it should be answered. Clearly, you won't be hiring someone who tells you that it is acceptable practice to leave confidential files in unlocked, unattended cabinets or lying on a desk during breaks or at the end of the day. When you ask this question, you will get the answer you are looking for, but that response won't tell you much about how the candidate deals with confidential information.

Even Better Question: Describe your experience in dealing with confidential information. What did you do to ensure that confidentiality was maintained?

As in the two earlier questions, by asking for this information you are letting the candidate know that confidentiality is important in this position. Unlike the previous questions, this version requires the candidate to provide more than a general statement about the importance of confidentiality and a standard description of how to handle confidential information, based on theory or in anticipation of how you want employees to deal with confidentiality.

You will listen to the candidate's answer for evidence of having dealt with confidential information and having done so in a manner consistent with what your organization believes is best practice.

During his *Interview Right to Hire Right* workshops, Nelson Scott works with participants to develop and ask questions that yield the high-quality information needed to make the right hiring decisions.

You Asked... about providing candidates with copies of the interview questions

The question: During a recent interview, the candidate asked me for a copy of the interview questions. He wanted to read along as I asked the questions. What should I have done?

Nelson's answer: This question highlights an obvious truth that took years for me to understand. The traditional approach to interviewing, in which the interviewer asks oral questions, puts some candidates at a disadvantage for at least two reasons.

First, you will encounter some candidates whose hearing is impaired. This may be due to the natural aging process, the result of an illness or injury, or the consequence of years spent listening to loud music through earphones.

Second, as most teachers are aware, people learn in different ways. Some (auditory learners) absorb information best by listening, while others (visual learners) learn best from reading the printed word. The traditional interview format favours the auditory learner over the visual learner.

Here are some guidelines to consider when you decide to offer candidates their own copies of the interview questions:

1. Be fair. Treat everyone the same. Make printed questions available to all candidates.
2. Provide only the basic or stem question. Don't provide the supplementary or probing questions. Normally you only ask these additional questions if you feel that the candidate's response is incomplete and you want further information.
3. Provide only one question at a time. Print each question on a separate sheet or card that you hand the candidate prior to asking that question.

Nelson welcomes questions from readers related to hiring and retaining staff, customer service, effective meetings, and other supervision-related topics. E-mail your questions to nmscott@telus.net.

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