

Briefly Noted

by
**Nelson
Scott**



VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2008

Service Stars

There is an old joke that goes something like this:

Question: *What is worse than finding a worm in your apple?*

Answer: *Finding half a worm.*

Maybe even worse is discovering that a half-eaten hot dog bun is mouldy.

When I made this discovery while attending a game during last summer's FIFA U-20 World Cup at Edmonton's Commonwealth Stadium, I decided to complain. What happened next was a demonstration of how to respond appropriately to a complaint.

I returned to the concession where I had made my purchase. The high school student who was volunteering to help raise money for her school cheer team seemed unsure of what to do. She disappeared, returning a moment later with a supervisor who knew exactly what to do.

Glancing at the blue spot on the hot dog bun in my hand, she responded with empathy. "Ugh! That's awful!"

She handled the situation with skill and speed. She made no excuses. She blamed no one. She immediately moved into service recovery mode.

"I'll give you a refund," she promised. "And would you like something to replace the hot dog? Popcorn? Nachos, maybe? Would you like cheese sauce and jalapeños with them? I am so sorry about this."

The concession booth supervisor understood what customers want when they complain. They want to be taken seriously. They want someone to listen. They want someone to understand their pain. They want someone to take action to resolve their complaint quickly and fairly.

Her quick action to fix the problem increased the likelihood that I will purchase another hot dog during a future stadium event (although I will certainly inspect it closely before taking my first bite). I will make my purchase confident in the knowledge that, if there is a problem, the vendor will fix it.

When complaints are handled quickly and to the customers' satisfaction, those customers are more likely to do business with the organization again than customers who have never had a problem. They trust the business. Based on their experience, they believe that the company will respond quickly and fairly to resolve future problems.

Nelson's Point of View

How does your staff respond when exciting replaces boring?

There are times when boring is best. Take air travel, for example. A good flight should be the most routine part of the day. Exciting is not a word that should be associated with commercial air travel.

As someone who travels regularly, my wish is that each flight will be an experience that quickly fades from memory...in other words, remarkably boring. Experience has taught me that this won't always be the case. Flights are delayed, diverted, and cancelled. Excitement replaces boring.

Thus, I am amazed that when travel is disrupted, it often seems to come as a surprise to airline staff. They seem unaware of what to do or say.

I witnessed such confusion during a recent vacation trip to San Diego. As we were waiting for a connecting flight in Salt Lake City, the gate agent gave us a "heads up". Due to fog in San Diego, our flight was being diverted to Los Angeles. From there, we would be bused to our final destination.

This caused me to reflect on how organizations respond when routine is disrupted. These situations test employees' customer service skills. The challenge is to deal with the unexpected in a way that leaves positive impressions in the customer's mind.

The airline personnel appeared not to understand this concept. The gate agent's announcement was just the first of a series which would best be characterized as incomplete, inaccurate, and often contradictory. By the time we had boarded the plane, the airline had discovered there were no buses available for charter. They would still fly us to Los Angeles, but after that we would be on our own. We could remain in Salt Lake City, but there were only a few seats available to San Diego the next day and our bags would not be unloaded...they were going to Los Angeles. One more thing: there was to be a further delay due to extra paperwork.

Later, a piece of good news. An "extra section" would be added the next morning from Los Angeles to San Diego. We should speak to an agent as soon as we landed. It would fill quickly because several San Diego-bound flights were being diverted to Los Angeles. Borrowing a cellphone from a flight attendant, I contacted the hotel in San Diego, even though it was too late to cancel the existing reservation. Next, I reserved another room in Los Angeles.

Arriving in Los Angeles, I rushed to the Delta ticket desk to book seats on the 7:30 a.m. flight while my wife waited for our bags. The first agent was unaware of the extra flight ("We don't fly there from here."), but did inform me that chartered buses had been arranged to move passengers to San Diego. However, those buses had left while I had been waiting in line. The next agent was aware of the extra section and booked the required seats. He cautioned that it would be best to arrive at least two hours early for the flight, as lines could be long.

The wake-up call came at 4:30 a.m. Arriving at the airport before 5:30, we found no lines. Check in took only minutes. Lots of time to get to the gate and board the flight to San Diego...along with only four other passengers...on a Boeing 767.

All in all, a memorable experience, but for the wrong reasons. When problems are handled poorly, customers remember. When they are handled well, customers also remember, but they are likely to return. How will customers remember your organization the next time the routine and boring becomes exciting?

*Common sources of excitement for many organizations are customer complaints. Nelson Scott offers two programs that prepare service providers to respond quickly to resolve customer complaints: **Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Loyal Customers** and **Loyal for Life** (developed by Service Quality Institute).*

This Newsletter is prepared by Nelson Scott of SEA Consulting to maintain contact with clients and other readers. Information presented here relates to Nelson's presentations and other services provided by SEA Consulting. Reprint permission is granted when the following credit appears: "© Nelson Scott, 2008. Reprinted with permission from Briefly Noted by Nelson Scott, a monthly internet newsletter. For your own subscription, go to www.seaconsultingonline.com."



Quote of the Month

"Sometimes even the best manager is like the little boy with the big dog, waiting to see where the dog wants to go so that he can take him there." – Lee Iacocca

Where is Nelson?

Friday, February 15

Calgary City Teachers' Convention (Calgary, AB)

- Oops! Free Hiring (Interview Right to Hire Right)
- Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Allies
- Staff Recognition: One Piece at a Time

Thursday, February 21

Palliser Teachers' Convention (Calgary, AB)

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

Friday, February 22

South East Alberta Teachers' Convention (Medicine Hat, AB)

- Productive Meetings in Less Time
- Staff Recognition: One Piece at a Time

Thursday, March 6

Central East Alberta Teachers' Convention (Edmonton, AB)

- Productive Meetings in Less Time
- Staff Recognition: One Piece at a Time

Friday, March 7

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Essential Skills of Communicating*

Friday, March 14

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Essential Skills of Communicating*

* 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

- The next time you have to create a password, choose a word that will remind you of the importance of staff recognition every time you use it, such as . . . thanks, appreciate, acknowledge, praise, value, compliment, recognize, applaud, honour, etc.
- Frame certificates before you present them to staff members. It adds value to your gesture of appreciation. It makes the certificate more than just another piece of paper.

You Asked...

Are BDI questions unfair to inexperienced applicants?

Question: I like the idea of Behaviour Description Interviewing (BDI), but isn't it unfair to ask recent graduates who are applying for their first real jobs about their past performances and then compare their responses to other, more-experienced applicants? Shouldn't potential count for something?

Answer: While on the surface it may seem that focusing on past on-the-job performance would put the candidate who has been doing the job for a number of years at an advantage, many interviewers have found that is not the case. Most new job seekers have enough relevant experience to respond to BDI questions. While they lack years of employment experience, many will have had practicum experience associated with their training, during which they will have encountered and responded to situations similar to those they will face in the workplace. In addition to practicum experience, many new job seekers are able to draw upon experiences gained from part-time jobs they held while students.

Candidates who are unable to find examples from these sources may find suitable responses to interviewers' questions in their volunteer experience.

When considering experience, some interviewers focus on the quantity of experience (number of years), rather than the quality of the experience. By asking BDI questions, interviewers can discover whether the candidates have done the right things in the right way. How the candidate handled a work-related situation in the past is the best predictor of how he or she will handle similar situations in the future.

That's where potential comes in. Based on the evidence collected during interviews, reference checks, and from resumes, interviewers judge which candidate has the greatest potential to do the job well in the future. What BDI questions allow the interviewer to do is base this prediction on evidence of past success, rather than hopes and beliefs that the candidate has potential based on training or personality.

Those candidates who are consistently unable to respond to BDI questions because they can't recall experiencing situations similar to those the interviewer describes may still have the potential to do the job well...or may not have that potential. Is this a risk worth taking?

Interviewing Workshop in Edmonton on April 7

Here is your opportunity to develop skills that will help you select the right candidate for every job...every time.

On **Monday, April 7** Nelson Scott will present **Interview Right to Hire Right** at the Lister Conference Centre on the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton (116 street and 87 avenue). This workshop will run from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

During this workshop, you will apply what you already know about what makes top performers successful to the hiring process. When you ask the right questions in the right way, the answers will help you predict which candidate has what it takes to succeed.

Here is only a sample of what you will learn:

- the principles of Behaviour Description Interviewing (BDI) and why BDI works
- strategies to structure interviews so candidates will open up
- a 3-step process for writing interview questions
- 8 techniques to probe for additional information by getting beyond candidates' superficial, well-rehearsed answers

- 7 reasons why interviews go wrong and 6 ways to keep them on track
- how to decide who to hire and how to advise candidates of your decision

The learning will not be limited to just this one day! As soon as you register, you will receive an article identifying 13 reasons that managers are so often "unlucky" when hiring.

Lots of Bonus Features

- individual feedback on up to five BDI questions that you develop during or following the workshop
- access to additional information related to the topic through a web page designed specifically for this group
- an invitation to contact Nelson at any time to ask questions or to clarify what was said during the presentation

Your investment to become a more skilled interviewer is only \$279 (plus GST), much less than the cost of one bad hire. For a complete program description, visit www.seaconsulting.com/IRHR. To register, phone (780) 433-1443 or e-mail nmscott@telus.net.

SEA
CONSULTING
Nelson Scott

Tel: (780) 433-1443
E-mail: nmscott@telus.net
www.seaconsultingonline.com

