

Briefly Noted

by
**Nelson
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VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 3

MARCH 2008

Service Stars ★ ★ ★ ★

Rather than driving to Jasper for a weekend of skiing at the end of February, we decided to take VIA Rail's Snow Train. It turned out to be a wonderful decision.

Big seats. Legroom (what a welcome change from being wedged into airplane seats!). You could leave your seats and move around the train car. You could visit with other travellers. When the spirit moved, you could order a snack, enjoy a glass of wine, read, or have a nap – all things you should not do while driving.

As if the comfortable seats and time to relax were not enough, there was Dianne. The service manager seemed committed to keeping the 60 passengers spread through two "Panorama" cars comfortable, informed, and entertained.

This became obvious even before we boarded the train in Edmonton. Dianne entered the station to invite families and groups of three or more to board first. Later, as the rest of us climbed onto the train, she pointed out which car would be quieter and which might be "livelier".

As we travelled west, Dianne appeared regularly to update our progress and to point out sites of interest along the tracks. Other times, she talked about the history of railroading in Canada or recalled memorable journeys from her 30-year career. As we neared Jasper, she provided tips on how to spend the weekend, explained how baggage would be detrained, and offered to order taxis.

During our Sunday afternoon return trip, Dianne passed through the car to distribute pillows and blankets to passengers. She offered complementary, non-alcoholic beverages when we were delayed due to disruption from a freight train derailment the day before.

Passengers were invited to visit a third car at the end of train, which Dianne described as typical of VIA's "comfort class" accommodation, in case anyone was considering future travel by train...something that service such as provided by Dianne makes more likely.

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Nelson's Point of View

A Donut Shop's Perfect Storm

Wikipedia describes the phrase **perfect storm** as referring to "the simultaneous occurrence of events which, taken individually, would be far less powerful than the result of their chance combination".

I was reminded of the phrase during a recent visit to Tim Hortons. Standing in line, I watched the changing messages on the video screen behind the counter, becoming increasingly aware of the convergence of conflicting values.

Many of these messages focused on the company's annual "Roll up the Rim" promotion, which the company's website explains "... is run so that our store owners can reward their loyal customers". Mixed in with these messages was an invitation to participate in a community cleanup.

Reaching the counter, I placed my order and presented my travel mug. Bringing my own mug entitles me to a ten-cent discount, part of the company's efforts to "deal with the litter issue".

I was about to leave the counter with my refilled mug when the server offered me an empty paper cup so I could roll up its rim in hopes of winning one of

the millions of prizes, from free donuts or coffee to boats and cars. Then, having done that, I could drop the otherwise unused cup into the garbage. I refused her offer.

Back in my vehicle, I found myself listening to a radio discussion of the Vatican's recent update to the 1,500-year-old list of seven deadly sins. Among the seven additional sins is "polluting the environment". The perfect storm of contradictory values was complete.

On one hand, this company is encouraging the use of refillable mugs to reduce waste, while on the other it is requiring these same customers to generate unnecessary waste if they want to participate in its contest. This is all occurring against a background of society's concern for the environment, as reflected most recently in the Catholic Church's new list of sins.

Having an organization's actions are inconsistent with its stated values or the values of its customers is not unique to Tim Hortons. This tale serves as a reminder to all organizations that they should ensure their actions are consistent with their values.

You Asked . . .

What's Wrong with "What If" Questions

The Question: What's wrong with asking "What if" questions during interviews? Won't they help me learn about how candidates will handle situations in the future?

Answer: Questions that begin "What would you do if..." are a common tool among interviewers. This is evident by scanning books that prepare job hunters for the interview experience. These books are often filled with suggestions on how to answer "what if" questions. Such opinion questions are not without value. From their answers, interviewers can learn what candidates value or feel is important, but the answers provide no evidence that the candidates have ever acted in the ways they describe – or ever will. What the interviewer may be hearing is a description of how candidates think they will respond, how the textbooks say they should respond, or how the candidates believe the interviewer would want them to

respond. Hardly reliable information on which to make hiring decisions.

Interviewers who ask behaviour description questions, that require candidates to describe how they have handled a situation in the past, are able to use these answers to predict how candidates will respond when faced with a similar situation in the future.

During his **Interview Right to Hire Right** workshop, Nelson Scott guides participants to develop behaviour description questions that will enable them to collect high-quality information, which can be used to make good hiring decisions.

Quote of the Month

"The worst mistake a boss can make is not to say 'well done'."

– John Ashcroft, British industrialist

Where is Nelson?

Monday, March 24

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Delegating*

Monday, March 31 – Friday, April 4

Keyano College/Fort McMurray Fire Department (Fort McMurray, AB)

- BUS 101: Report Writing and Presentations

Monday, April 7

Public Seminar (Edmonton, Alberta)

- Interview Right to Hire Right
(For program details and registration information, visit www.seaconsultingonline.com/IRHR)

Tuesday – Saturday, April 8 – 12

- Attending the North American conference of the International Association of Facilitators (www.iaf.org) (Atlanta, GA)

Friday, April 18

Finning Canada/Keyano College (Fort McMurray, AB)

- Behaviour Description Interviewing
- Effective Discipline*

* 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.

Only a few days left to register for Nelson's only public seminar of 2008:

Interview Right to Hire Right

Monday, April 7, 2008

8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**Lister Conference Centre
University of Alberta**

To register:

Phone (780) 433-1443

Fax (780) 433-1413

E-mail nmscott@telus.net

For program details and registration information, visit:

www.seaconsultingonline.com/IRHR

Recognition...Just for Coming to Work

The crowd erupted. Sixteen thousand fans cheered...whistled...applauded. It was as if something wonderful had just happened.

But nothing had happened. The referee still hadn't dropped the puck...and wouldn't for several more minutes. None of the twenty-two Edmonton Oilers had done anything yet...no highlight reel goals, no crushing bodychecks, no dazzling saves. All that the players had done so far that January evening was to skate out on the ice.

It was the workplace equivalent of arriving at work.

There really is nothing unusual about showing up for work on time. Daily, millions of workers do this in hundreds of thousands of workplaces across Canada. And no one seems to notice.

Unlike better-paid professional athletes, these "regular" folks are never greeted with applause when they arrive. For the most part, the only times they receive feedback are when they show up late, or not at all.

Somehow, this picture doesn't seem right. Why should professional athletes be greeted so enthusiastically when they arrive for work, while everyone else is greeted with silence and seeming indifference? Shouldn't there be times when teachers, nurses, retail

workers, service providers, technicians, and other regular folks be told that they are appreciated...just for coming to work day in and day out?

You may not have an arena that you can fill with cheering fans, but there are simple ways you can show that you appreciate your staff just for being there.

Be present when they arrive. Greet them as they enter the building or the work area. Say good morning. Shake their hands. Occasionally, offer them a muffin or donut. Serve them breakfast. On particularly chilly mornings, provide a warm welcome in the form of a steaming cup of hot chocolate. On a fine spring morning, offer each a flower.

Do something to let them know that you are happy just to see them...just because they have shown up for work!

*In programs such as **Fire the Employee of the Month, Staff Recognition: One Piece at a Time, Retaining Staff Without Spending Buckets of Money, and Retaining Winning Talent**, Nelson Scott helps participants discover simple, low-cost ways that front line supervisors can show staff they are appreciated.*

Staff Recognition Ideas

- Practise "walk-by" staff recognition. As you move about your office, hospital, school, or across the shop floor, be alert for staff doing things well... for good performance in progress. When you see it, let the employee know that you have seen it. Give him a thumbs-up, a nod of acknowledgment, a smile, or a few words of appreciation. Recognition is best when it is timely and it is never more timely than when it is delivered while what's being recognized is still happening.
- When you delegate a special task or assign a staff member to an important committee, you are conveying your trust and confidence in that person. It is a great way to let someone know she is valued and you are confident the important task will be done well. Explain that your decision to ask her to take on the task was based on how well she handled similar assignments in the past.
- Celebrate the contributions of every departing staff member, whether they're leaving due to retirement, resignation, transfer, maternity leave, or promotion. Doing so sends a strong message of appreciation to the departing employee...and to those who remain. (Hint: Don't limit celebration of staff contributions just to those who are leaving – it may become an incentive to leave!)
- Training can be used as a recognition tool. Rather than simply sending staff to programs, explain how learning new skills will expand the employee's job opportunities within your organization. Link the training to the employee's potential as you perceive it, based on your observations of his on-the-job performance.
- Business cards can be an effective way to recognize staff who have reached professional milestones, such as earning another university degree, achieving industry certification, or meeting sales targets. Have the employee's business card redesigned to reflect her achievement. Every time she presents her card she will be reminded of her accomplishment. When clients notice and ask about the achievement, the staff member will have an opening to describe her success.
- Never be at a loss for words when writing thank-you notes or composing an e-mail of appreciation. Create a list of phrases that you can draw from to praise individuals' performances. Refer to it often...whenever you put your words of thanks into writing. Here are a few phrases to get you started: amazing working; outstanding results; great effort; dazzling; terrific job; good work, exemplary performance; wonderful solution.

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