Briefly Noted by Nelson Scott

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Sevice Stars ☆☆☆☆

Discovering that you are not on the airline's passenger list is an anxiety-inducing experience. Having an airline employee step up to resolve the problem is a great relief.

Unable to obtain boarding passes from the self-service check-in kiosk at the San Diego airport on a January afternoon, we approached the Alaska Airlines counter. Jovita looked at our travel documents before searching for our file in the computer. After a few minutes, she said that the return portion of our flight was shown as having been "exchanged". Standing before her, suitcases in hand, it must have been obvious that we didn't share this understanding. Many computer keystrokes later, Jovita had another question: "Did you visit Los Angeles as part of this trip?"

We had. Due to fog in San Diego, our Delta flight ten days earlier had been diverted to Los Angeles. Overnighting there, we had completed our journey the next morning. While booking our flight to San Diego, the agent in Los Angeles had apparently cancelled our return flight.

Now, with an understanding of the problem, Jovita set out to resolve it. She assured us that we would make our flight to Seattle, with connection to Edmonton. Even though we still didn't have boarding passes, Jovita checked our bags to ensure they would not be left behind.

Unable to issue boarding passes from her computer, Jovita contacted a supervisor. Putting down the telephone, she advised us that our boarding passes would be brought to the counter and asked that we step aside. As she served other customers, she regularly made eye contact to reassure us that we had not been forgotten.

Eventually, Jovita stepped from behind the counter and approached us. Our boarding passes had been delivered to the gate from which our flight would be departing. She provided us with passes to get through security and we arrived at our gate in time to board the flight. Connections worked in Seattle and we arrived home as scheduled.

Nelson's Point of View

They Won't Love That Gift Just Because It is From You

While in Atlanta to attend the North American conference of the International Association of Facilitators in April, I went to the Perimeter Mall in search of a quick meal. In the food court, I came face-to-face with a poster, with a message that was just plain stupid:

"She will love what you buy because she's your mom."

You may recall when as a five-year-old, you came home from kindergarten with something special for your mother. She seemed thrilled with the pencil holder you had made from an empty soup can and a few popcycle sticks. She gave you a hug and told you she would keep it forever.

And you believed, just as you did a few years later when, after saving your allowance for weeks, you used your accumulated wealth to purchase the largest bottle of perfume your mother had ever seen. She was so happy and promised to save it for special occasions…*really* special occasions.

Time passes and you reflect on childhood experiences. You now realize why there were so few of those special occasions. Maybe the gift wasn't so special after all. It did not match your mother's interests and preferences.

It would seem that those who created this slogan for the Perimeter Mall never reached this level of understanding. They still believe it is the gift that is important and that any gift will do, as long as it comes from you. It is a cynical interpretation of the truism that "it is the thought that counts".

The poster reflects the sense of obligation surrounding the practice of honouring mothers on the second Sunday in May. A gift shows that you remembered Mother's Day. Settling for any gift shows that while you are good at remembering dates, you don't know – or remember – enough about the recipient.

Some supervisors take the same approach to staff recognition. Give an employee a gift and it will show I care. A bigger gift shows I care more. Give everyone the same gift and it shows I care about all of them…equally. And because it is coming for me, they will love it.

That's not going to happen. Unlike mothers on Mother's Day, staff members aren't going to hug their supervisors because they remembered to give them gifts. While some may truly love the gift, most will receive it with indifference or even disdain.

What makes recognition meaningful is that how is expressed is appropriate for the recipient. For some, a gift may be the right way to express appreciation. But for other, it won't be. To recognize effectively, a supervisor must not only notice when the job is done well. She must also know each employee well enough to know the form of recognition that would be most appropriate for that individual. The more appropriate the means of expressing appreciation, the stronger the message of appreciation…whether directed towards staff members…or your mother.

Recognition with a Mother's Day Theme

- Write a brief note to each child whose mother is part of your staff. Express how much their mother is appreciated. Describe one or two ways that she contributes to the organization's success. Say thank you for sharing his/her mother.
- Drop a line to the mothers of each of your employees. Say what you admire about her child. Tell her to be proud of her son or daughter. Express your belief that children learn their work habits from their parents. Congratulate her on doing a good parenting job.
- Don't forget to do something special for fathers as well on their day… **Sunday, June 15.**

Quote of the Month

"If your company is going to put your customers first, then you must put your employees more first."

– Tom Peters

High-value, Low-cost Staff Recognition

- Use an upcoming visit by your supervisor as a staff recognition opportunity. Encourage your supervisor to take time to visit with staff. Prepare her to provide specific and timely recognition by identifying a contribution made by at least one person with whom she will be meeting or something the group as a whole has accomplished.

- Make a new employee feel part of the team even before his first day on the job by sending a welcoming e-mail or e-card, or by leaving him a voice mail to let him know you are looking forward to working with him.

- Collect a variety of sticky notes (different sizes, shapes, and colours or reserve one specific shape or colour to be used exclusively for staff recognition). They are great to use when you want to leave a quick message of appreciation. Attach them anywhere – to a staff member's computer, to the wall, on her desk, to a well-written report. And remember, even though the message is brief, it is important that it includes the recipient's name.

- Reserve a bulletin board in a high-traffic area, where it will be seen by staff and customers, just for recognition – acknowledgements from customers, notes of appreciation from co-workers, articles about staff members from the local media or the company newsletter. This is not the space to post memos, company policies, or "for sale" ads. Remind everyone of the bulletin board's purpose by adding a heading that asks, "Who have you recognized today?"

- When a staff member returns from a conference, invite him to share the ideas he gained from it with you and his co-workers. Encourage him to implement this learning. When he does, recognize him for doing so.

- Keep staff recognition fresh and vibrant by taking time every few months to look at what you are doing to recognize staff. What's working? What's not? What should you keep doing? What needs to be changed? What should you stop doing? What do you need to start doing?

- Make certificates more meaningful to recipients by including brief descriptions of what about their performances warranted recognition.

Introducing a Tool to Improve Employee Engagement

What is employee disengagement costing your organization? What would the results be if more of your employees were fully engaged?

Through its affiliation with Vital Learning, SEA Consulting is able to offer clients a high-impact program designed to identify, quantify, and increase employees' emotional commitment to their work.

Employee disengagement has a serious negative impact on organizations. Disengaged employees are generally less productive employees. To the degree that they "infiltrate" teams, disengaged employees create a disruptive effect. They stimulate negativity by talking only about what's wrong. These are unhappy people who talk to other unhappy people. They get hung up on problems and are not open to other options.

Research findings from various sources, including Gallup, Towers Perrin, and the Conference Board, suggest that from 17 to 24 per cent of employees are actively disengaged. Another 54 to 66 per cent are described as "not engaged" (emotionally detached from work, doing only enough to get by).

Leading2Engage™ (EE 2.0©) delivers work unit scorecards and recommendations to enhance manager understanding and action. EE 2.0© is based on recent research – conducted since 2005 – by Curt Coffman, an undisputed authority on employee engagement for 30 years and co-author of the best-selling management book, *First, Break All the Rules.* Coffman's research involved thousands of interviews with high performers that spanned 26 industries, including nurses, salespeople, teachers, engineers, human resources specialists, government employees, managers, and engineers.

Most employee engagement products consist of a survey that produces a data report based on staff responses. But then what? Organizations are left on their own to find meaning in the data.

EE 2.0© begins with a streamlined survey process that requires only three minutes of each employee's time to access and respond to the instrument. Each item on the survey instrument has a proven relationship to business outcomes.

Reports, delivered within 21 days, provide intelligence – not data – that offers definite strategies, insights, and recommendations to improve the level of engagement and performance in each work unit.

During a one-day seminar, managers and supervisors will be led through a process that models the actions they will take to engage their team in understanding and improving their results. Managers and supervisors will leave with a results-focused plan of action.

You Asked…

About the Stages of the Hiring Process

The Question: *What portion of the hiring decision should be based on the applicant's resume, the interview, and reference checks?*

The Answer: This question has no simple answer. It would be easy to say that one-third of the hiring decision is based on the resume, one-third on the interview, and one-third on the reference. Or maybe the ratio is 20 – 60 – 20…based on the fact that the interview consumes the most time…or 30 – 50 – 20 or…

In truth, the answer depends on where you are in the hiring process. At each stage, the manager will decide whether or not to continue to consider the applicant. What is in the resume will determine if a candidate will make it to the interview stage. For the candidate who is not invited to an interview, one hundred per cent of the hiring – or non-hiring – decision is based on the resume.

Depending on what the candidate says during an interview, the interviewer will decide whether or not to continue to consider him. If the candidate is dropped from consideration, most or all of this decision is based on the interview.

Typically, reference checks are conducted only for those candidates who are tentatively selected. If information gathered during this stage supports the hiring decision, the reference checks can be seen as only a small factor in the hiring decision. On the other hand, reference checks have a much greater role if they produce new information that leads to a decision not to hire.

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