

Briefly Noted

by
**Nelson
Scott**



VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 5

JUNE 2008

Service Stars

I recently interrupted a Sunday morning trip to Fort McMurray to visit my mother in Westlock and take her to church. Following the service, we stopped at the Cattle 'N' Company in the Best Western Hotel for lunch.

Our waiter was George, someone whose performance was above that one often receives from servers. He seemed to genuinely enjoy his work. He was friendly, smiled often, and engaged his guests in brief conversations.

His demeanor seemed well-suited to serving the guests seated in his area – there appeared to be at least one senior at each table. He explained the menu options carefully – soup or salad? Mashed, French fries, or baked potato? He waited patiently as decisions were made and orders placed. As I watched him serve nearby tables, there was no evidence that he was trying to rush people to make decisions.

George also presented a proper balance between being too attentive and ignoring his guests. When guests needed him, he was there. He sensed when coffee cups needed to be refilled.

He did, as most servers do, ask that ubiquitous food service question, "How is everything?" But unlike most of his peers, he actually waited for the guests to answer.

When it was time to leave the restaurant and the bill had been paid, George held the door as I wheeled my mother out of the building to the parking lot.

Nelson Scott provides customer service training for front-line staff and managers, with a particular emphasis on responding to complaints in a manner that keeps the customer and creates loyalty.



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."

Nelson's Point of View

How Green is Staff Recognition?

There is a question I have thought about repeatedly since I attended the 2008 Recognition Professionals International (RPI) conference in Newport Beach, CA at the end of April. Is staff recognition environmentally unfriendly?

At the registration desk, we were told that the conference was "going green". Many of the presentation handouts were on a USB flash drive. Attendees were encouraged to refill the plastic water bottles found in their conference bags, which were themselves made with recycled materials. Provisions were made to recycle paper and drink bottles. Name badge holders could be returned at the end of the conference for reuse. Rather than being presented with gifts that they might not need or use, speakers were told that 15 trees would be planted on their behalf in the nearby San Diego area devastated by wildfires only a few months earlier.

RPI invited attendees to submit suggestions to make future conferences even greener. All these suggestions were entered into a draw for travel mugs that were awarded throughout the conference.

Another aspect of the conference was a day-long trade show where suppliers displayed their wares...plaques, certificates, trophies, paperweights, boxed pen sets, clocks, desk caddies, mugs, lapel pins...the list could go on forever. Supplying recognition trinkets is big business. Bob Nelson, the author of several best-selling books, including *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* and *The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook* estimates that \$27 billion is spent annually on recognition merchandise.

One imagines that those who spend this money are giving what they purchase to their staff, hopefully to convey messages of appreciation for what they do and what they achieve.

But, then what? What happens to this stuff after it has been presented? Certainly, some plaques will be displayed on the walls of the recipients' offices or homes. Some trophies adorn the shelves of bookcas-

es. Some employees will sip their morning coffee from the company mugs they receive.

But not all the plaques, trophies, and mugs will be treasured in the same way. After gathering dust for a few weeks or months, they will be discarded. What was given is not valued by the recipients because what was given was not appropriate for the recipient.

Recently, an acquaintance unintentionally illustrated this point. She showed me a set of glasses etched with her employer's logo that she – and every other employee – had received to mark a milestone in the company's development.

"I would really like to have more of these," she told me. "They are really expensive glasses, but most people don't know that. I am sure I'll be able to buy more at garage sales next summer."

While some may recycle unwanted trinkets through garage sales or donations to charities, many others will simply discard them with the household trash.

Much of the \$27 billion is being spent on items destined for landfills.

How does one avoid environmentally unfriendly staff recognition practices?

First, don't assume that, just because you like something, your staff will too. Get to know your employees. If gift giving is part of your recognition plan, ensure that what you give is appropriate...something they will value and use. Better yet, give gift cards that recipients can use to purchase something that they will actually use. Even better, stop relying on things to do the talking. Thank employees face-to-face, or send them a simple thank-you note.

*Nelson Scott offers makes several presentations related to staff retention and recognition, including **Fire the Employee of the Month, Staff Recognition: One Piece at a Time, Improving Staff Retention Without Spending Buckets of Money, and Retaining Winning Talent.** Contact him to book training for your supervisors and managers.*



Quote of the Month

"Most people don't need to be taught; they need to be reminded."

— C.S. Lewis

High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

- July is Ice Cream Month and Sunday, July 20 is designated as National Ice Cream Day. Express your appreciation to staff by serving them ice cream cones at their desks on some warm July day.
- Rather than waiting until the end of a major project to recognize a team's success, celebrate each time they reach a milestone that moves the project closer toward completion.
- At the successful conclusion of a project, present the team with a collage that comprised of mementos of their journey...photos of them at work, related newspaper or newsletter articles, and other items that reflect what they had to do to succeed.
- Make and deliver a fruit basket.
- Offer to wash an employee's car or brush off the snow in the winter.
- Think of all the places you can post sticky notes with your words of appreciation...on a computer screen, on a well-prepared report, on the wall, on the door of an employee's office, on the envelope containing the employee's paycheck...
- Take an employee out for lunch or prepare a bagged lunch for him/her.
- Offer to take over an employee's job for an hour or a day.
- Attend the first meeting of a project team to express your appreciation that they are willing to undertake the task and your confidence in their ability to complete it successfully.

To get quality hiring information, ask quality questions

Typically, hiring interview questions fall into four categories: technical, experience, opinion/situational, and behavioural. While questions from all four categories can be used to explore the same topics, the quality and quantity of information collected by listening to the responses will vary greatly depending on the type of questions asked.

Here is an example of four types of questions to show how each could be used to explore two topics...a teacher's ability to teach science and a retail worker's ability to serve customers.

Technical Questions	Analysis
Teacher: <i>What training do you have to teach science?</i>	Unless you don't have the applicant's resume or application, there is no reason to ask questions like these. The candidate will already have supplied this information. Otherwise, you wouldn't be interviewing him. What you may need to do is ask questions to clarify content of the resume.
Service Provider: <i>In which of your previous jobs were you required to serve customers?</i>	
Experience Questions	Analysis
Teacher: <i>Which science courses have you taught in the past?</i>	At least some of this information is likely on the candidate's resume. If not, you may need to ask. But be cautious about putting too much faith in experience – just because someone has performed a task doesn't mean she has done it well. Seek evidence of previous success, not merely experience.
Service Provider: <i>In what ways have you served customers in the past?</i>	
Opinion/Situational Questions	Analysis
Teacher: <i>If you had to teach a lesson on _____, how would you prepare?</i>	Answers to "what-if" questions depend on the interviewer assuming that what the candidate says he would do is actually what he will do. There is no evidence to support any answer given.
Service Provider: <i>What would you do if you had to deal with an angry customer?</i>	
Behavioural Questions	Analysis
Teacher: <i>Describe a science lesson you taught. Take us through the process from planning the lesson, teaching the students, and assessing their learning.</i>	To use the phrase attributed to Sgt. Joe Friday, a character in the 1950s TV series <i>Dragnet</i> , "Just the facts, ma'am". Questions asked in this fashion are meant to gather evidence of what actually happened in the classroom or retail setting. Listening to the response is the next best thing to actually having been there. Knowing how the candidate handled the situation allows you to ask yourself, "Is this how I would like a similar situation to be dealt with in our organization? Is this how our top performers would handle it?"
Service Provider: <i>Think of a challenge you faced when serving a customer and how you were able to use your strengths as a service provider to respond to the situation.</i>	

Are you on the cutting edge of creating culture as a competitive advantage?

Spend an hour with Curt Coffman, the Chief Science Officer of MAJERS and the co-author of the best-selling business book *First, Break All the Rules* during a free webinar on Tuesday, June 24. Curt will share the latest research and perspectives on corporate culture as he discusses an organization's greatest opportunities for obtaining and sustaining competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Organizations are experiencing increasing pressure to allocate their resources in areas that can deliver sustainable performance improvements. In the past, that has meant product and service improvements, but

today's data is showing a new source for sustaining marketing advantage: the organization's culture.

Join Curt to learn how the culture and the people can combine to provide a competitive advantage which is not only sustainable, but which is immune to duplication by competitors.

This highly-applicable topic can be invaluable to you in presenting Employee Engagement solutions.

*This free webinar is scheduled for **Tuesday, June 24** (2 p.m. Eastern, 1 p.m. Central, 12 p.m. Mountain and 11 a.m. Pacific Time). **Register on-line at:** www1.gotomeeting.com/register/519499721*

SEA
CONSULTING
Nelson Scott

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

