Briefly Noted by Nelson Scott

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Sevice Stars

While Amy would have stood out in any service environment, her appearance at our table in Moxies Restaurant in Fort McMurray was particularly welcome. The community at the centre of Alberta's oil sands development is plagued with a chronic shortage of service providers and an abundance of customers. These are circumstances under which service can suffers.

From the time we were shown to our table, we knew that we were in the presence of a true service star. Amy demonstrated how to maintain the balance between friendly, attentive service and pretending to be the guests' new best friend. She showed respect for her customers by not imposing herself into our conversation.

She was always conscious of what was happening at our table and able to identify when her service was required. Whenever she was serving other tables in the area, Amy would glance in our direction. Was there anything we needed? Water glasses were refilled before becoming empty.

The quality of service that we could expect of her quickly became evident. Recognizing one member of the party from a previous visit, Amy asked if she would like the same drink that she had ordered before.

When describing the daily specials, Amy recommended the featured soup. She explained that after tasting it earlier in the day, she had ordered it for her own lunch. She thought we would enjoy it. Based on her advice, I ordered the soup.

When she returned to the table later, she inquired about my impressions of the soup. Had I enjoyed it? She seemed genuinely interested in my response and relieved when my response was positive.

As a customer, I felt that here was someone who cared about my dining experience. I look forward to Amy being my server on my next visit.

Nelson's Point of View

Research: Top Performers Most Likely to Leave

Some recent research findings are worrisome and should cause us to think about how we treat our top performers and what we are doing to retain them.

After surveying 16,237 employees, Leadership IQ found that the very people who make organizations successful are the ones most likely to be actively searching for a new job *(A summary of this study is available at: www.leadershipiq.com/quitting.html).*

Nearly half (47%) of employees who were classified as top performers, based on annual performance appraisals, were submitting resumes and going for interviews.

Even more disturbing is the finding that they are being driven to leave by their managers.

"The worst part of this is that we typically cause our high performers to quit by how we treat them," says Leadership IQ CEO Mark Murphy.

"Frankly, we treat our high performers worse than any other employee. When a manager has a tough project upon which the whole company depends, to whom do they turn? Who gets the late hours and the stress? It's not the low performers, because managers want the project done right. Instead managers turn to their handful of high performers. Over and over we ask them to go above and beyond, making their jobs tough and burning them out at a terrible pace. Meanwhile, low performers often get easier jobs because their bosses dread dealing with them and may avoid them altogether."

And how likely are these low performers, who the organization might even benefit from losing, to be looking for a new position?

Not very, according to the study. Only 18 per cent of low performers and 25 per cent of middle performers are actually looking for other work.

What this study illustrates is the important role direct supervisors play in retaining staff. As many have observed, "People join companies, but they quit managers."

Corporately, organizations can provide salaries and benefits that attract new employees. But for most employees, that's not enough. If it was just about money, it would be easy for another organization to come along offering higher pay and better benefits.

To be committed and engaged, employees need an emotion bond with their organization. More than anything else, the strength of this bond depends on the relationship that exists between the employee and his/her supervisor, which is significantly influenced by how the employee is treated.

Managers the need training and tools to enable them to build strong relationships with employees through staff recognition and other retention strategies.

*During **Retaining Winning Talent** (a full-day program developed by Vital Learning), Nelson Scott encourages leaders to focus on their top performers and identify their retention needs. During other presentations, Nelson promotes the use of meaningful, low-cost staff recognition as a means of improving morale, building commitment, and increasing retention.*

Quote of the Month

"Start with good people, lay out the rules, communicate with your employees, motivate them and reward them. If you do all those things effectively, you can't miss."

– Lee Iacocca

Join Nelson for a Half-day Workshop in Fort McMurray

The following workshop is being presented in conjunction with Keyano College in Fort McMurray, Alberta:

Delegating
Friday, December 12 (8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)
Room 140, Bob Lamb Building
This program highlights the need for clearly communicating expectations and encouraging participation and involvement. Effective delegation establishes a team member's responsibility and authority for a delegated task, creating a framework for accountability and personal growth.

To register for this program, phone 780-792-2688 or visit the Registrar's Office at Keyano College, 8115 Franklin Avenue (8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. weekdays). The registration fee for each module is $149 plus GST.

This and other modules are part of Keyano College's Leadership Development Certificate program, and they are also available on-line.

For more information, visit:
www.seaconsultingonline.com/keyano.htm

PLEASE INTRODUCE OTHERS TO
Briefly Noted

We would like to build our Briefly Noted mailing list and we are asking for your help to do so. If you know of people who would benefit from these monthly collections of tips on staff selection, customer service, effective meetings, and staff recognition, please encourage them to subscribe. Currently, there are 750 people on the distribution list. Our goal is to have 1,000 subscribers by January.

As a bonus, everyone who subscribes between now and the end of January will receive a collection of at least fifty staff recognition tips that appeared in previous issues of Briefly Noted. And there are additional gifts for both new subscribers who get us to the 800, 900, and 1,000 levels and for the people who encouraged them to subscribe.

"Training" Meeting Participants to be Late

I often begin my ***Productive Meetings in Less Time*** presentation by asking participants what bothers them most about meetings. While answers are varied and extensive, one beef that never fails to make the list is meetings that don't begin on time.

A top reason that meetings don't begin on time is that participants have been trained to arrive late. Evidence suggests that many are quick learners and become better at being tardy over time.

I illustrate this by describing a board of which I was once a member. During the first year, the meetings were chaired by someone who was punctual. The meetings were scheduled to begin at 8:15, and without fail, that is when they began, whether everyone was in the room or not. Soon, everyone arrived by 8:15.

The next year, when the chair's term was over and someone else assumed the role, things changed. Meetings seldom started on time. The new chair would often arrive at the last minute or late. He would socialize beyond the scheduled start time. Other times, he would announce that, "We will wait just a few minutes for the stragglers to arrive."

The result? Everyone began to assume the meeting would begin late, so they arrived later. As the participants became increasingly tardy, the meeting was delayed while the chair waited for late-comers. Eventually, the room was virtually empty when the scheduled start time of 8:15 arrived. As a result of the late starts, meetings regularly ran beyond their scheduled end times – reflecting another common complaint of meeting attendees.

As a meeting chair, show respect for participants who show up on time by starting meetings when scheduled. If chronic late-comers discover that meetings won't wait for them, they may be just as quick to learn to be on time for your meetings.

*Want your team to spend less time in meetings during which they accomplish more? Nelson Scott's **Productive Meetings in Less Time** presentation may be the answer.*

High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

- Invite employees to decorate their workplaces with family photos, items that reflect their personal interests, and awards. Any of these could be a great conversation starter when you – or someone else – drops by their offices. And they provide hints that will help you personalize future recognition.
- Need to express appreciation, but don't have a thank-you note handy? No problem. Use a picture postcard. Write your note of appreciation, address the postcard, and mail it. When you mail a postcard with a message of appreciation to the recipient's home, her whole family will already know how much you value her contributions by the time she sees it.
- Recognize employees with the most valuable gift of all – time – both yours and theirs. Rather than sending a thank-you note, deliver it to the deserving recipient personally. Stay to visit. Ask questions and listen to the staff member talk about his work, his family, or his outside interests. Or reward the staff member with time – the opportunity to leave early or come in late, to take an extended lunch or coffee break, or even to take a day off to use as she wishes.
- Take over a front line employee's job for a shift or roll up your sleeves to work beside her for an hour. Not only will you show your appreciation – you will also learn more about the challenges she and other employees face every day.
- Take photos during recognition events and send copies to the person(s) being honoured.
- After your staff has completed a big project or achieved a difficult goal, thank them by cooking them breakfast, serving them lunch, or barbecuing burgers in the parking lot.
- When staff members reach an employment milestone or meet a specific performance standard, mark the occasion by presenting them with a special lapel pin that they can wear with pride.
- How are you doing when it comes to recognizing staff? Not sure? Then ask for their feedback…during individual, face-to-face conversations, at a staff meeting, with a survey, or through the assistance of a third party.
- Maintain a scrapbook of positive newspaper and magazine articles about your business or organization. Place it where staff and visitors can read it. The success of your organization is based on the efforts of your staff.
- Carry a supply of thank-you notes in your briefcase. Whenever you have a few minutes, such as when waiting for an appointment or on an airplane, use that time to write notes of appreciation to staff members who deserve them.
- Let the person most responsible for the completion of a successful project make a brief presentation about it to the Board of Directors or the management committee.