

Briefly Noted

by
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Service Stars ☆☆☆☆

I have been going to the Tim Hortons restaurant across from Edmonton's University of Alberta Hospital for a couple of years. I purchase a cup of tea and find a quiet table where I can use the energy of a room full of strangers to fuel my writing. Most of this newsletter was written in this or another coffee shop.

These visits can also be times to observe people, such as Linda, as they go about their lives.

Among the bland sameness of the servers, Linda stands out. A woman of small stature, she seems barely able to peer over the counter to greet her customers.

And greet them she does. With Linda, it is never a simple "Next". She genuinely seems to want to serve each customer.

"Can I help you, please?"

"Good morning."

"Oh, it's you again."

When a young boy arrives with his father, Linda comments on the sports team whose logo appears on the son's cap.

Some might argue that such greetings are a waste of time, reducing service efficiency. After all, customers are there for their morning caffeine fix, not conversation. This may be true for some, but not for Linda.

She is someone who can do two things at once. Friendly and efficient. Able to engage customers in conversation while quickly filling their orders.

I even put Linda to the test. During one visit, I positioned myself where I could observe Linda as she served customers. In the course of my observation, she served twice as many customers as two of her colleagues combined.

During a lull, Linda didn't stand and wait for the next customers to appear. She busied herself with housekeeping tasks, replenishing the supply of paper cups or refilling napkin holders. When customers did appear, they received one of Linda's friendly greetings before their orders were quickly filled.

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Nelson's Point of View

Finding a Link Between Recognition and Longevity

When Kate Winslet and Sean Penn collected their Academy Awards in Hollywood last month, they may have received more than a golden statuette. They may have also received the gift of four more years.

Researchers at the University of Toronto medical school found that Oscar winners live an average of 3.9 years longer than non-winners... 79.7 years versus 75.8 years. And the benefits seem even greater for multiple winners, who lived an average of six years longer. Four-time winner Katharine Hepburn lived to age 96.

Dr. Donald Redelmeier suggests that this recognition has a powerful impact on a person's health. "Once you've got that statuette on your mantel place, it's an uncontested sign of peer approval that nobody can take away from you... it leaves you more resilient. The normal stresses and strains of everyday life do not drag you down," he told CBS news.

What does this mean for the rest of us?

It could be that being recognized is good for one's health. Staff members who are told regularly that they are appreciated for what they do may be more able to deal with the stresses of everyday work and be more

resilient when faced with challenges than others who work in an environment characterized by an abundance of negative feedback.

Or, suppose for a moment that the researchers got it wrong. It's not that the winners live longer; it's that those who are not recognized die sooner. Staff members who go for weeks, months... even years... without receiving any positive feedback or no feedback at all may be uncertain about whether or not they are meeting expectations.

They may interpret a lack of feedback as evidence that they are failing and that it is only a matter of time until their supervisors overcome any reluctance to deliver the bad news. They become preoccupied with not knowing how they are doing. Their productivity drops. Stress-related absences increase. They worry themselves into early graves.

It doesn't matter which of these interpretations we apply to this data. The message is the same: well-delivered recognition is likely one factor in extending a person's lifespan. Recognition may also increase how much of those longer lives people spend working for your organization.

Celebrate the Power of Peer Recognition

What every workplace needs is more of the most powerful recognition of all... peer recognition.

You can unleash the power of peer recognition in your workplace by joining the movement to observe the third Tuesday of each month as Peer Recognition Day. Use this day to remind staff of the importance of recognizing co-workers... on this day and as well every other day of the month.

No one understands better what's involved in doing a job well than another who does the same job. Co-workers know what skills are required and the challenges that must be met to be successful.

Knowing that peers understand adds credibility to their positive comments about a co-worker's contributions and achievements. Peers trust peers. This is what makes peer recognition work.

Clearly peer recognition is important enough that it deserves its own day... at least once a month.

For more about peer recognition, read **Co-workers: a potent source of recognition** on my website at: www.seaconsultingonline.com/Articles/Recognition/recog_18.htm. This article includes several tips on how to encourage peer recognition.

"Some want to be recognized by you, 'the boss'. Others see their peers as the truest source of recognition. Others crave their praise on a public stage. Others shun the glare of publicity, valuing only that quiet, private word of thanks."

— **Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman,**
First, Break All the Rules

Quote of the Month

"The old adage 'People are your most important asset' turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are."

– Jim Collins, author, *Good to Great*

Low-Cost, High-Value Staff Recognition

- Not sure how best to recognize individual staff members? Ask them. This could either be done face-to-face during a one-on-one meeting or as "homework". Ask each person to list five to ten ways she would like to be recognized for doing her job well. Tell her that any suggestion is acceptable, but it should be something she would value.
- Think seasonal when planning to do something to express appreciation to all staff... something green for St. Patrick's Day... a flower on the first day of spring... a candy egg or chick for Easter... something red and white for Canada Day ... a Halloween treat.
- Name a meeting room after someone who has made a long-term contribution to the organization.
- Rather than simply announcing a new program or service, include in your announcement quotes from staff members who were involved in planning for it. They can explain in their own words how customers, staff, and the organization will benefit from the change. Note: This type of recognition should be limited to times when others will see the change as positive.
- Invite top performers to greet and show visitors around.
- When a hockey player performs well, the coach sometimes rewards him with time on the power play, which improves the player's chances of scoring a goal. What is the equivalent of a power play in your organization? Is there a short-term "dream assignment" that you can offer your top performers?
- Invite top performers – people who understand what is required to be successful – to join the selection team when you are hiring new staff.
- Begin meetings by asking staff to recognize the efforts of co-workers: Who helped you complete your work? Who made your work easier? Who came through for you? Whose efforts contributed to your ability to complete a task on schedule? Who has given 110 per cent during the past week (month)?

You Asked . . .

Is it okay to ask if her husband might be transferred?

Question: When I hire, I want to be sure that people are likely to stay. Whenever I interview a woman, I inquire if her husband is likely to be transferred any time soon. Is that OK?

Answer: This is one of those questions that scares me... and angers others. I know that it is asked all the time, often by well-intentioned interviewers who are concerned about staff continuity within their organizations.

Unfortunately, this is not how to go about getting the information you want. First of all, a question such as this clearly violates protection of human rights legislation that prohibits discrimination based on an individual's marital status.

Even if that wasn't the case, this would still not be a good question. To interpret the response, the interviewer needs to make certain assumptions, which is not a firm basis upon which to make a hiring decision. Just because the candidate's spouse is unlikely to be transferred doesn't mean that she is automatically committed to remaining with your organization. And if he is transferred, this does not mean that she will naturally follow him to a new location.

There is a third reason, which I experienced several years ago when conducting my **Interview Right to Hire Right** workshop. Among examples of questions

that interviewers should not ask, I included this question. One participant reacted angrily.

"You can't believe how many times I have been asked that question!" she exclaimed. She explained that as the former wife of an RCMP member, she had always been asked this question.

It is hard to imagine that, having been asked this question, she would have accepted a job offer, no matter the job or how well-suited she was to it. By asking the question, the interviewer had created a barrier to her desire to join the organization.

If you are concerned about whether a candidate is prepared to commit to your organization for the long term, ask. "If we were to offer you this position, how long would you plan on remaining with us?"* This may provide you with the information you want, but remember that what a candidate says during an interview is not a good predictor of what will happen in the future. Sometimes, a candidate says what he thinks you want to hear. In other cases, circumstances change, making it impossible to fulfill the commitment made when the person was searching for employment.

*One final caution: If you ask this type of question of some candidates, ask it of all... male or female. Gender is another area protected by legislation.

The Bell Tolls for Those Who Serve Customers Well

All I wanted when I visited the Taco Bell restaurant near our Fort Lauderdale, Florida hotel was a quick meal. What I received was much more. The experience not only fed my hunger; it also fed my passion for collecting examples of how businesses encourage customer service and provide opportunities for immediate feedback for a job well done.

A bell was mounted on the wall near the service counter. Beneath it was a sign.

**The Customer Service Champion says:
When we do well...
RING THE BELL.**

As I waited to place my order, I watched as departing guests, who were obviously pleased with the service, grabbed the cord attached to the clapper and gave it a ring.

The bell seemed to serve several purposes. With every ring, staff members were reminded of the importance of customer service. It provided regular and immediate feedback to staff. Every time it tolled, they knew that, as a team, they had performed in a way that met a customer's expectations.

They may not have known which individual had performed well, or what specifically he or she had done, but they knew that, as a group, they had succeeded.

It was interesting to watch staff reaction when the bell rang. Those who were closest to the bell would pause long enough to say "thank you" to the ringer. It served as another reminder of the need to focus on individual customers.

One final observation: whenever the bell rang, most of the staff smiled, something they shared with the customer they were serving at the time. It is not difficult to imagine that those smiles reflected good feelings that translated into better service from a more engaged workforce... one that kept the bell ringing.