

Briefly Noted

by
**Nelson
Scott**



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Service Stars

What made our visit to The Kettle of Fish stand out is the consistency of service from one server to the next and from one visit to another. It was not a case of a positive first experience being followed by a second, less satisfying visit.

Our first visit occurred on a Friday evening. Having just arrived in Vancouver that afternoon, we wanted to eat at a restaurant near our hotel. The server that evening was Sabrina, someone who had the ability to be there when needed and to be almost invisible at other times. She seemed to sense when it was time to appear and when to disappear. She provided a complete description of that evening's three-course special, before taking our order.

Shortly after each course was served, she returned to inquire what we thought of the food. Certainly this is common in most restaurants, but how she phrased her question suggested she was interested in our assessments. The ubiquitous and trite, "How is everything?" was not for her.

When it was time for dessert, she asked if we wanted to "rest" before moving on to that final course.

Noting the restaurant served brunch, we decided to return Sunday morning. By coincidence, we were seated at the same table next to the windows at which we had been seated two days previously. This time, Adrian was our server.

As knowledgeable and unobtrusive as Sabrina, Adrian also sensed when it was appropriate to visit with guests. The thousands of participants in the "Sun Run" who flowed past the windows created an obvious topic for conversation. Did we have trouble making our way to the restaurant? He described his own challenge, cycling to work that morning with more than 50,000 runners and walkers on the city's streets.

The conversation was as brief as it was topical. When the food was served, Adrian left us to enjoy our meal alone...until it was time to offer coffee and tea.



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Nelson's Point of View:

What I learned from Dan's mother about family-friendly recognition

With Mother's Day occurring in May, I am reminded of an important lesson I learned from a woman whom I never actually met. Families are important and should be included in our recognition efforts.

Dan, a fifty-something gas company employee, came to our home a few years ago to inspect our furnace. Impressed by Dan's customer service, I featured him as a "Service Star" in the October 2004 issue of this newsletter (read Dan's story at www.seaconsultingonline.com/Articles/Service/star_13.htm).

Having written the column, I might never have thought much about Dan again if his manager had not been a subscriber. Doug let me know that he had shared the newsletter with Dan, who had then sent a copy to his mother.

A few weeks later, there was a voice mail waiting for me when I returned to my office. Hesitantly, nervousness evident in her voice, a woman began by referring to the article about Dan, summarizing its key points. Now, sounding more confident, she thanked me for what I had written. She concluded by proudly announcing, "I am Dan's mother."

What an epiphany! Parents want to be proud of their children, whether they are preschoolers or adults well-established in their careers. Parents want to know their children are doing well in whatever they do.

Parents rely on others to provide them with reasons to be proud...teachers, coaches, youth group leaders...and their children's bosses.

From the time their offspring get their first after-school or weekend job, parents want to know their children are performing well in the workplace. Knowing their children perform well in a fast food restaurant or for a retailer reflects well on their upbringing. Parents can feel proud of how their kids turned out.

In February 2007, I told the story of Dan's mother during a teachers' convention in Calgary. After the

presentation a teacher approached me. She had a story to tell.

During one of her mother's visits from out of town, the teacher had taken her on a tour of her school. At one point, they encountered the principal. Introductions completed, the principal turned to the young teacher's mother. He wanted her to know how much he appreciated having her daughter on staff. He described her contributions to student learning.

The mother never forgot those words of praise. The teacher recalled that whenever she was feeling down about teaching and questioning whether she should continue in her profession, her mother would remind her of what the principal had said. It must have worked. She was still teaching.

Most supervisors may never meet the parents of their staff, but this doesn't mean they can't let parents know their child is doing well...maybe through a phone call or in a letter to the parents. Describe what their child is doing well. Let them know she is a valued member of the staff and appreciated for what she does. Give them credit for doing such a good job raising their child. They should be proud of how she turned out.

What Dan's mother's voice mail message demonstrated is the need to feel proud of your child's success isn't limited to parents of younger workers. All parents want to know their children are successful in their chosen careers.

Become the messenger of this good news. While Mother's Day and Father's Day are obvious times to give parents of your staff members reasons to be proud, you shouldn't limit yourself to these once-a-year occasions.

And don't stop with just mothers and fathers. Include other family members - employees' spouses or partners, children, grandparents - in your family-focused recognition plans. Demonstrate your understanding of the importance of family to employees by making recognition family-friendly.

See page 2 for high-value, low-cost staff recognition tips with a family-friendly focus

"Behind every successful man is a proud wife and a surprised mother-in-law."
— Hubert H. Humphrey

Quote of the Month

"A facilitated session is a highly structured meeting in which the meeting leader (the facilitator) guides the participants through a series of pre-defined steps to arrive at a result that is created, understood and accepted by all participants."

— Michael Wilkinson,
The Leadership Strategies Institute

High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

All this month's tips describe ways to make your recognition efforts more family friendly:

- Send flowers to a new staff member's home on his first day.
- Send flowers or another small gift to the partner of a staff member who has had to work extra hours on a big project.
- Offer an employee who has been travelling on company business an evening out with his or her spouse, in the form of theatre or movie tickets or a gift certificate for dinner at a favourite restaurant.
- Send a thank-you gift to the staff member's family... a fruit basket for the family, a toy or book for a child, flowers or a bottle of wine for a spouse... "Thank you for sharing your parent/spouse/child."
- Be generous about allowing staff members extended periods of paid or unpaid leave to deal with family matters.
- Find out the ages of staff members' children and send them cards or small gifts on their birthdays.
- Send a gift to parents (or grandparents) of a new baby... perhaps the baby's first book, inscribed with a message describing how much the parent or grandparent is valued by your organization.
- Provide staff members with coupons for time off to attend a concert or to volunteer at their children's (or grandchildren's) school.
- Send notes to children of staff members, thanking them for sharing their parents with your organization.
- Send greeting cards to family members on appropriate occasions, such as birthdays and anniversaries.
- Send sympathy or get well cards to family members when appropriate.
- Send congratulations cards for births, when children graduate, or when they get their first jobs.

When hiring, focus first on what's essential... you can train for other skills

The restaurateur's words sent a shiver down my back. "I hire for attitude and train for skills." The truth is I wasn't sure exactly what he meant. I suspect he wasn't either. Subsequent events suggested his hiring strategy may not have worked particularly well. A few months later, the restaurant was gone and the property was up for sale.

It would certainly be unfair to place blame for the restaurant's demise solely on the owner's hiring practices. There were likely other factors that came into play.

It should also be acknowledged, as well there was some validity to the former restaurateur's approach to hiring. We cannot reasonably expect that any new employee will possess all the knowledge, skills and qualities necessary to be fully productive on the first day. We should anticipate that every new employee will arrive requiring position-specific training.

A manager should begin the recruitment process by carefully listing the knowledge, skills, and qualities possessed by those who are most successful in positions similar to the one to be filled.

The next step is to divide the list into three categories:

Essential – what the new employee must have when hired. This would include basic credentials, such as a B.Ed. degree for a teacher, appropriate certificates for a tradesperson, or minimum typing speed for a secretary. There may also be particular skills and qualities the manager has observed are key to the success of top performers, such as teamwork, collaboration, or conflict resolution.

Conference was an opportunity to learn more facilitation techniques

What would draw hundreds of people to Vancouver at the end of April? If your answer includes the weather, you would certainly be right. Spring has already arrived on the West Coast. Flowers are blooming everywhere.

But there was another reason to be there...the North American conference of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). Attendees were from around the world. In addition to meeting attendees from Canada and the United States, I had the opportunity to speak with people from Hong Kong, Barbados, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Taiwan, and Australia. All were there to learn from some of the most effective facilitators in the world.

My goal was to acquire new techniques I could use when clients invite me to facilitate planning sessions and other meetings, and I certainly was not disappointed. I returned feeling more confident in my ability to work with clients to understand their needs, and to use this information for designing processes that

Desirable – what the new employees must have to be successful, but may not have when hired – and therefore will need training to develop. These might include a supervisor's ability to communicate and recognize staff, a teacher's ability to participate as part of a professional learning community, or a hotel clerk's skill in dealing with guest complaints.

Job-Specific – areas where a need for training is almost a given. Few people from outside the organization will have the required knowledge and training. This may include training in the use of computer programs specific to your organization or industry, or a particular piece of equipment the new hire will encounter for the first time.

When reviewing resumes to shortlist applicants to interview, the manager should look for evidence that applicants have the knowledge and skills determined to be essential. These candidates are the only ones who should be considered as potential interviewees. If the interviewee list is too short, it may mean the list of essentials is too long and some points need to be moved to the desirable category.

When it is time to interview, focus first on the qualities from the essential category. These questions, and the candidates' responses to them, will be the most important considerations when deciding whom to hire. As time permits, use other questions to explore topics from your desirable category.

will involve participants in creating solutions to which they are committed.

As a result of my attendance at this IAF conference – and previous ones in 2007 and 2008 – I have added techniques to my facilitation tool kit. They will enhance my skills to frame questions which will focus participants' discussions, to capture participants' wisdom, to encourage everyone's participation, to deal with dysfunctional behaviours, and to assist groups to achieve consensus. I also came away with additional ways to ensure that commitments made during facilitated sessions lead to action.

As if these were not enough benefits to justify my attendance, the conference offered me a bonus. While I was learning to become a more effective facilitator, I discovered a number of facilitation techniques that could be applied to my training programs. They will enable me to develop workshops that are more interactive and provide more opportunities for participants to learn from each other.