

Briefly Noted

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by
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Service Stars

The process of checking guests into a hotel is pretty routine. It happens hundreds of times a day at larger hotels. The guest arrives. The desk clerk smiles and welcomes him or her to the hotel. The guest announces his or her name. The desk clerk asks for a credit card and photo ID. The clerk enters information into the computer, returns the credit card and ID, hands the guest a room card, and wishes him or her a nice stay.

That's it. The process seldom varies, but when it does this can make the experience memorable. Even a small, positive diversion from the expected can change a routine interaction into an exceptional customer service experience.

Rosario created a couple of those memorable moments as we checked into the Sheraton Gateway Hotel at Toronto's Pearson Airport. When she noticed my grandson standing at my side, she turned to Carter and asked how many friends he had back home.

"Four," he replied. Rosario handed him four key cards—for his buddies back home. When Carter pointed to his sister Paige, who was sitting in a chair across the lobby, Rosario offered four similar souvenirs for some of her friends.

Now, once more focused on the task of checking us in, Rosario searched her computer screen. After a moment, she shifted her attention back to me. "The hotel isn't full tonight, so I am going to upgrade you to a larger room."

She explained that this room had two beds and a hide-a-bed. That way, there would be a bed for each child.

With the next leg of our journey to Walt Disney World scheduled for 6:30 a.m., the next day, the prospect of everyone getting a good night's sleep was welcome news.



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Nelson's Point of View

10 Top Ideas from Recognition Conference

The challenge when we return from conferences and conventions is to sift through the pages of notes we took while listening to keynoters and attending breakout sessions to find those few keepers that we will implement or share with others.

When I returned from the 2010 conference of Recognition Professionals International, which was held in late April at the Green Valley Ranch in Henderson, Nevada, I challenged myself to select 10 ideas that could easily be applied to other organizations to share with *Briefly Noted* readers. Here is my RPI Top 10 for 2010:

1. Recognition can help organizations achieve their corporate goals. At Delta Airlines, one goal is to win a JD Power award for customer service. "We want to use recognition to get there," Stephanie Merchiere said during her opening keynote presentation. "If we treat staff well, they will treat customers well." Kimberly Abel and Robbie Robbie of Diamond H Recognition said that employees who feel appreciated are more likely to provide better customer service and be more productive. Ann Foley of Metlife Home and Auto said her company wants to create "an environment where all associates feel valued and the behaviours that drive business get recognized and rewarded". At her company, there are four, easy-to-remember reasons that staff are recognized: customer focus, teamwork, leadership and results.
2. Recognition needs to be culturally sensitive. Whether yours is an organization that operates in 72 countries, as Delta Airlines does, or a local company with a workforce that reflects Canada's diversity, recognition needs to be culturally appropriate to be valued by recipients.
3. Recognition can support change. Dr. Carol Pletcher, co-founder of the Global Center for Recognition, explained that staff members are more likely to support an organization's efforts to change if recognition is tied to behaviours that support the change.
4. Customers can be enlisted to contribute to recognition efforts. Members of the top tiers of the Delta Airline's frequent flyer program—the people who should know best what superior service look like—are given "A Job Well Done" certificates that they can present to employees who provide exceptional service. Employees may then exchange these certificates for points that can be redeemed for awards in Delta's program.
5. Recruit recognition champions. At Metlife Auto and Home, and at Ohio State University Health Center, recognition champions spread the recognition message in their departments, ensure that tools of recognition are in place, and encourage day-to-day recognition.
6. Recognition must remain current. Programs and processes that are no longer working need to be retired. At Ohio State University Health Center, they went beyond just retiring the old programs, Amy Hurley said. Funerals were held for programs that were no longer going to be used.
7. Managers can make or break your recognition efforts, said Kimberly Abel and Robbie Floyd of Diamond H Recognition. They feel that the ability to recognize staff should be seen as a leadership competency.
8. Recognition can help answer employees' key questions, said Kimberly and Robbie, such as:
 - What do you want me to do?
 - How do I do it?
 - How am I doing?
 - What's in it for me?

In addition to helping answer these questions, recognition can also increase employees' engagement and motivation and make them feel valued and appreciated.

9. Recognition increases commitment, which has benefits for supervisors and the company. Commitment leads to loyalty to the organization, which reduces turnover and increases the likelihood that staff will refer family and friends to the organization, said Kimberly and Robbie. These referrals can reduce recruitment costs.
10. Appreciation is often felt, but too seldom expressed. During the presentation that closed the convention, author Judith Umlas (*The Power of Acknowledgement*) posed a question that we should all ponder: "How many thoughts of acknowledgement pass through are brains, but are never expressed?"

Note: The next RPI conference will be held at the Grand Hyatt in San Antonio, Texas, from May 1 to 4, 2011. For more information on RPI and the 2011 conference, visit www.recognition.org.

Quote of the Month

"Every day you make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb."

—Winston Churchill

High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

- Time may be the world's most important resource. It is something that everyone values. And of course, there never seems to be enough of it. Say thank you to a staff member with a gift of time—an extra hour for lunch, an afternoon off to run errands, or a full day to turn an ordinary weekend into a long weekend.
- When making a presentation or writing a report to describe a project that was completed successfully, on time and on budget, give credit to those who helped meet the goal. Don't just talk about the "great team." Mention the individuals who made it possible by name.
- When you witness someone thank another for his assistance or congratulate a co-worker for an accomplishment, acknowledge the person who is providing this recognition. Encourage more recognition by recognizing the recognizers.
- A Snickers chocolate bar could be a fun way to acknowledge someone who raises morale by injecting fun and humour into the workplace.

Dates that provide staff recognition opportunities

June is National Candy Month: Celebrate the month by using a sweet gift to acknowledge staff members' contributions.

Saturday, June 5 – World Environment Day: Recognize those who are helping your organization to "go green."

Thursday, June 10 – National Iced Tea Day: Pour a cold glass of iced tea for your team and stick around to visit. Let them know that you think that what they do is "cool."

Tuesday, June 15 – Peer Recognition Day: Take time to thank your co-workers for their contributions—to your organization and to making your job easier and more enjoyable.

Sunday, June 20 – Father's Day: Acknowledge the fathers on your staff, thank your staff's fathers for sharing their children, and let children know how much you appreciate having their fathers on staff.

Monday, June 28 – National Handshake Day: Reinforce your messages of appreciation by shaking people's hands.

Politicians offer lessons in how not to apologize

Typically, politicians do a poor job of apologizing. They seem unable to simply admit when they have made a mistake, to ask for forgiveness and to promise to do better in the future.

Consider the recent case of Jean-Pierre Blackburn, the Minister of Veterans Affairs. According to media reports, he became upset when security screeners said he could not take a bottle of tequila aboard a flight from the Ottawa airport. When they refused to empty the contents in front of him, Blackburn became so angry and verbally abusive that the staff considered calling the RCMP to deal with the situation.

Weeks later, Blackburn apologized—sort of. "At no point did I request preferential treatment; it's not in my nature," the minister was quoted on the CBC News website in a statement he released to the media. "Granted, I was definitely upset at what happened, and I apologize to those I could have offended. That being said, the rule is clear. The officers applied the rule. And I complied unequivocally." (Read or view the report at www.cbc.ca/politics/story/2010/03/19/airport-blackburn-security.html)

What is wrong with the minister's statement is his failure to acknowledge that he really did anything wrong. He does admit to being "definitely upset," which seems to be an excuse for his behaviour. He also tells us that the "rule is clear." (I.e. no containers larger than 100 ml) and that he "complied unequivocally"—eventually!

This brings us to the core of his apology: "I apologize to those I could have offended."

Let's look at what he did and didn't say. There is no acknowledgement that his behaviour was inappropriate, that we should expect better of a cabinet minister, or that those responsible for the safety of airline pas-

sengers deserve to be treated with respect. There's not even a promise that he will not repeat the behaviour in the future.

All he said is that he is sorry to those he *could* have offended. In other words, if the screeners chose to be offended, he is sorry they made that decision. But really, it is partly their fault—after all, they didn't have to be offended by his words and actions. They could have understood his situation—an important person with a busy schedule who just didn't have time to put his booze in his checked luggage like the common folks.

While Blackburn made himself an easy target for criticism, his misadventure can also serve as a lesson to the rest of us. While we may never get into an argument we can't win with airport security staff, there may be times when we fail to meet a customer's expectations, or those of a staff member, and should apologize.

When this happens, we should offer a sincere, excuse-free apology in a timely fashion. "I failed to do what I said I would do. I know this is unacceptable and I can understand why this would be upsetting to you. You expected more of me, and I failed to deliver. I apologize for my actions (or lack of action) and will take immediate action to correct the situation. And if you ever give me another chance to serve you, I promise to do a better job of meeting your expectations."

*Knowing when and how to apologize is one topic explored during **Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Loyal Customers**. Contact Nelson to learn more or to schedule this or another presentation for your staff, association's convention or meeting.*

Reference Checks Tip

Sometimes when conducting a reference check you may wish to refer to something the candidate said or did during his interview. Be prepared, should this need arise, by having your interview notes near at hand.

If the reference can't think of an example or provides an inadequate example, you may want to refer to the candidate's answer. For example, you might say, "When we asked Fred a similar question during his interview, he responded that he was able to find the Spenser report you were looking for because of the way he had organized his files. Do you recall this situation? Is this how you remember things happening?"

Be prepared to follow up with a supplementary question. If the reference said, "Yes" ask, "What about how Fred organized his files made it so easy for him to find this report?" If the answer was "No," ask, "What can you tell me about how Fred kept his files organized?"

In either case, you are seeking examples of behaviour that helps you understand the reference's assessment of Fred's organizational skills.

*Obtaining high-quality information through reference checks is one of several topics discussed during **Interview Right to Hire Right** workshops. Contact Nelson to learn more or to schedule this or another presentation for your staff, association's convention or meeting.*



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