

Briefly Noted

by Nelson Scott



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Service Stars ★★★★★

My brother Jim, who owns a small furniture store in Grande Cache, Alberta, is the source of this story that illustrates that small actions can make a big difference to how customers perceive the service they receive.

In early January, Jim travelled to Toronto for a furniture show. The night prior to his early morning departure, he stayed at a hotel near the Edmonton airport. Like other hotels near airports, this one offers guests the option of leaving their vehicles in its parking lot and taking the hotel shuttle to the airport. Jim took advantage of this opportunity to save a few dollars in parking fees.

When he returned a few days later to pick up his truck, it was gone. After reporting the theft to the RCMP and his insurance company, Jim shifted his attention to getting back to Grande Cache. He needed to rent a vehicle.

This was not as simple as it would seem. It was a Monday, with a heavy demand for rentals from business travellers. In addition, poor road conditions had triggered a higher-than-usual number of insurance-claim related rentals, so no vehicles were available at the airport. He would have to go to downtown Edmonton to rent a vehicle—and even then, he would have to wait.

The airport shuttle dropped him at the Westin Hotel in the city centre. By now, he had exhausted his cell phone battery, and with nowhere to charge it he had to rely on pay phones at the Westin to contact his family, the insurance company and the car rental agency.

Some of these calls required him to write down confirmation numbers and other information. Happily, he found pens and paper on the counter below the pay phones. Providing paper and something with which to write may seem like a small thing that would go unnoticed by most hotel guests—until they have to write something while on a pay phone.

When they are needed, small things can make a big difference in terms of customer service.

P.S. This story ends well. A week later, the RCMP discovered the missing truck about 300 km from where it had been left.

HQCA survey asks: “Are you afraid to complain?”

It may be the right question to ask—and maybe the question that needs to be asked—but it wasn’t a question that I expected to be asked by the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

In November, I received a survey from the HQCA about the care and service that my mother receives as a resident in a continuing care centre.

One question particularly stood out among those that one might expect to find on a survey on this type, such as ones about the quality of care; the availability and quality of staff, information and programming; and of course, food quality.

Question 41 was a surprise:

“In the last 6 months, did you ever stop yourself from talking to any nursing home staff about your concerns because you thought they would take it out on your family member?”

The surprise is not how the question was asked, but that it was asked at all. The HQCA appears to understand that the greatest barrier to customers providing feedback—especially negative feedback—is fear.

“How will they react if I complain? What will they say? How will they treat me? What will they say about me after I leave? What will happen the next time I need to do business with them?”

Several years ago, I was roused from my bed at 3:30 a.m., by someone ringing the doorbell repeated and pounding on the front door, all of which attracted the attention of the dog sleeping in the backyard, who then made his own contribution to the din. Looking out the window, I saw two police cars on the street. I immediately thought of our two kids, both of whom were living in Calgary at the time. Something bad must have happened to one of them. Why else would police be at my door in the middle of the night?

When I opened the door, I discovered three RCMP officers on the doorstep. Nothing had happened to either kid. The officers were investigating a hit and run involving “your Dodge pickup.” I didn’t then—and never had—owned a Dodge vehicle of any sort.

Clearly, they had come to the wrong house. At 3:30 in the morning! After I had confirmed that I was not the suspect they were seeking they quickly left—without a word of apology for waking me unnecessarily.

Did I complain? Of course not! Why not? I was afraid to!

If I had complained, how would I be treated the next time I encountered any of these officers? I knew they all had access to an unlimited supply of ticket books.

But even being woken at 3:30 a.m. has its benefits. I now have a story that I have told to thousands during my *Customer Service MAGIC: Changing Complainers into Loyal Customers* seminar. It leads into a discussion of why only about one out of 20 customers who encounter a service problem actually complain.

Parents don’t complain when something happens about their children’s school because they fear that, “the school will take it out on my child.”

As patients, we don’t complain to our doctor or dentist because we fear that they will take something out of us that doesn’t need to be taken out.

Unfortunately, most customers are reluctant to complain. Whether our customers are patients and their families, parents or retail shoppers, hearing their complaints can provide us with opportunities to correct problems and learn from the experience. When we resolve problems quickly, our actions can increase customer loyalty. Resolving customers’ problems builds trust and we all like doing business with people we trust.

It is against this background that I discovered the HQCA’s question.

I admire the courage shown by the HQCA in asking this remarkable question. I wonder how many other organizations—schools, health-care facilities, government agencies, retailers and maybe even police services—would be as brave. And would anyone ask a similar question when surveying staff—the *internal* customers?

For the record, I was able to check the “No” box on the HQCA survey. We have had few reasons to complain about the care and service our mother receives, and when we have raised a concern, the facility manager has been open to our feedback.

Fear is just one reason that customers don’t complain. Learn about other reasons by visiting:

www.seaconsultingonline.com/Articles/Service/service_01.htm

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High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition

Last month, I had the opportunity to present sessions on staff recognition at the North Central (held in Edmonton) and Central Alberta (Red Deer) teachers' conventions. Following the sessions, some of those who attended emailed descriptions of staff recognition techniques they use. They have permitted me to share them with you.

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Principal Phil Penner described how he encourages peer recognition at Glendale Middle School in Red Deer with a type of pass-along award:

"Our school mascot is the Gladiator. Last year, I started circulating a journal that was entitled, *Gladiators Pay It Forward*. The intent is for the receiving staff member to read what the presenter had written for them, write a message to a colleague, and then present the book to that staff member."

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Jenn Brown from Elk Island Public Schools described two ways in which staff is recognized at her school, as a team and as individuals:

Team: "During report card time, we give each teacher a Kit Kat chocolate bar with a note attached [that reads], 'Take a break on us.' When they want to use it, they just email us a day that would work and we relieve them for 15 to 20 minutes during class time, so they can enjoy the time!"

Individual: "We start each year with a handwritten note to each teacher, welcoming them to another school year and telling them why they are an excellent asset and value to our students!"

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Vice principal Katharyn Blades provided a description of awards presented during staff meetings at Annie L. Gaetz School in Red Deer:

Making Lemonade out of Lemons: we have a tag on a lanyard that says this. It's to recognize a staff member who is just going through a tough time, either professionally or personally.

Dream It, Create It, Anything is Possible: a tag on a lanyard for someone who is doing new and innovative things in their classroom or the whole school.

Got It Together: a tag on a lanyard. This prize focuses on recognizing people for their organization of activities, intramurals, social committee, etc.

Hanging Loose: This is a form of recognition from staff member to staff member. We have a lei and a pair of funky sunglasses. The receiving staff member keeps it in their room for the month.

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And these are only some of the staff recognition techniques I heard about from people who attended my sessions. Others will appear in future issues of Briefly Noted.

Quote of the Month

"Effective recognition is a little hard (but worthwhile). It's strategic. It's timely. It's frequent. But most important, it's human."

— Adrian Gostick & Chester Elton, *The Carrot Principle*

Get up and go look for people to recognize, it's good for your health

The benefits of managers and supervisors getting out from behind their desks and spending time with front-line staff are well documented in terms of improved morale, increased commitment and engagement, and reduced staff turnover. All of which are good for the organization.

Away from their offices, managers and supervisors have more opportunities to witness people doing their jobs well and provide timely, on-the-spot recognition. This is something that is good for the emotional health of those receiving the recognition—and for those providing it.

Now, recent research from Queensland University in Australia suggests another reason for people to get

up from their desks and move around regularly. On January 12, 2011, *The Telegraph* reported on research that shows, "getting up from one's desk every few minutes could be the secret to a healthy heart—and a slimmer waist."

The British newspaper said that lead researcher Genevieve Healy, "urged office workers to stand up while making calls, walk over to colleagues to speak to them rather than phoning or emailing, go to the lavatory on another level (taking the stairs, not the lift)—or even hold meetings standing up."

For managers, she could have added spending time out of your office, visiting and getting to know your staff—and providing positive feedback for jobs done well.

Tax workshop for small and home-based businesses – March 7

Here is a workshop that will interest anyone who operates—or plans to operate—a small business, including home-based businesses.

The Joy of Tax for Entrepreneurs: Keeping the Jingle in Your Jeans! is a three-hour workshop scheduled for Monday afternoon (1 – 4 p.m.) or evening (6 – 9 p.m.), March 7. Lorn Stanners, a Certified Management Accountant and a colleague from the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers will present the workshop in the training room at the Creating People Power office at #1, 9750-51 Ave., Edmonton.

To register, or for more information, email lornc@financiallyspeaking.ca or phone Paula (780) 901-2990. The cost is \$129, including GST, or \$149 at the door.

Here are just a few things you will learn:

- Who should own the vehicle? You or your company?
- How the Quick Method of GST may save you dollars
- How to pay your spouse and/or children
- How to maximize claims for home offices
- Commonly missed reasons to incorporate

Book Update

The editing done, the next step is graphic design

I feel that my first child has left home and is out there in the cruel world all alone.

Last week, editor Helen Metella completed her task, making several suggestions that improved the quality of my writing. Now that these changes have been incorporated into the book, the project is the hands of the graphic designer.

Andrew Johnstone (www.andrewjohnstonedesign.co.uk) has prepared several publications for me and my clients over the last decade. He has designed books for several Canadian publishers, as well as his own book, a guide to the prehistoric sites in the Peak District National Park in England. This project was one requirement he had to complete to earn a MA in Communication Design at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London (He graduated in 2009 with distinction).

There is still one big task ahead—finding the right title. While we all know we shouldn't judge a book by its cover (or title), the reality is, we all do. This makes these few words the most important any author will write.

Are you willing to help me to find the right title? While the book was being edited, I occupied myself by generating and testing several possible titles for the book. While I eliminated some possibilities, there are still several others that I am considering.

I have created a very brief survey that I invite you to complete. The responses will help me determine which title works best. Copy this link and paste it into your browser to indicate which title you feel works best: www.surveymonkey.com/s/GQV7MQY. The survey will only be available until March 9.



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