

**HOSPITALITY HOT POINTS****TARA LANDES**

*Appreciate your team and customers
will flock to your business*

November is on its way, and while our snowbirds make their way south, flocks of American tourists will travel north to British Columbia to celebrate their Thanksgiving long weekend.

The tourism industry has begun to augment its staffing numbers to welcome the onslaught, and it's seeking outstanding staff. But it's not always easy to find ready-made, hospitable, seasoned service people.

Is good help hard to find, or can you take anyone and make them great? Small-business leaders often side with the former, but best practices repeatedly prove the latter is more accurate. Let's take a look at some of the best practices for appreciating your staff and the effect that can have on improved customer service.

Availability of motivated, talented workers in the labour pool can appear to be cyclical. There are those times you experience a stampede of highly trained, self-motivated people applying to work for you. Then there are the dry times when talent and skill seem to have migrated, leaving you parched in Talent Wasteland. This cycle is not as unavoidable as the seasons. You can create that amazing staff.

"When we started the company, it was a challenge to attract great people," said **David Udow**, CEO of **Ziptrek Ecotours**. "No one knew who we were. We couldn't offer the same compensation others offered, and we needed our staff to work during prime outdoor activity hours, unlike the restaurants and bars.

"We learned that there's a lot more to attracting and keeping great staff than paying bags of money or giving them prime time off. For starters, it is surprising what the right kind of thank you will do."

When I heard David say this, I thought

back to the Olympic volunteers. They were highly informed and motivated to serve – all for a free jacket, a few pins and a chance to be a part of a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Creating that class of excellence requires more systems and processes than this article can hold, but getting started will yield surprising results.

Begin by implementing the best practices for appreciating your staff. Do what the leaders at Ziptrek, the Olympics and other world-class hospitality providers do.

Be specific. Saying a generic "Thanks for the hard work" can have little positive impact. Be specific with your praise: "I know you had to stay two hours late to close, but you made those people's night! I just wanted to say thanks for the hard work."

Which would you rather hear? At their core, all people want to feel appreciated and know that their manager noticed how great they really are.

Be timely. Recognize the behaviour as soon as possible after it occurred so it is clear in the mind of the employee why they are being recognized. The clearer it is in their mind, the more likely they are to repeat the behaviour.

Don't just praise the result, praise the effort, too. "My in-store designers routinely shock clients with their in-depth knowledge and great service. But, I found most of them were getting their positive reinforcement from customers," said **Stephanie Vogler**, president at the **Cross Décor and Design**.

"What I learned is that I could get specific about what my staff were doing to make the

experience great, which encouraged them to do those things more often." When difficult customers are shopping for example, instead of her staff members being frustrated by the experience, they now know that whatever the outcome, they are doing the right things the right way and can remain positive and motivated.

Be genuine. We've all learned to be wary of false praise as it usually means someone wants something from us. (Think of the clothing salesperson who tells you it looks fabulous no matter what you try on.) Be genuine in your praise and watch the effect it has on your team's morale and performance.

Stay in your comfort zone.

If you find it awkward to give someone face-to-face praise,

then try another medium. Written, electronic, even leaving a voicemail can all be highly effective methods of communicating your appreciation for someone that went above and beyond.

They also make it much more likely that you will communicate with employees about their behaviour, instead of putting it off until you (and they) have forgotten.

Small-business leaders know how costly it is to replace great people. Ensuring your team knows how great it is will delight customers and improve employee retention and your bottom line. ■

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