

Manager of First Impressions

The Two-Minute Schmooze

647 words = 4 minute read

Steve Harrison is one of three founders of Lee Hecht Harrison, the world's leading Talent management company. At one point, the time was right to bring on a chief operating officer. The company needed an executive to handle the day-to-day responsibilities of running a rapidly growing company with offices, at that time, in more than 25 cities across the United States. The COO the company hired was named Ray. He had an MBA and had recently retired from the US Army with the rank of brigadier general.

Steve decided to take Ray on a tour of the company so he could get to know as many people as *possible*.

Steve and Ray started their tour with several branch offices in the Northeast. At midmorning, the team arrived at their first stop, a midsized branch, and passed through the glass doors into the familiar reception area. Melissa, the receptionist, was on duty.

"How are you, Melissa?" Steve asked casually as they approached the reception desk.

"Fine. And you, Steve?"

"Great. Have a good day."

"You too."

Steve then proceeded toward the *interior* offices. Suddenly, he found himself being pulled back into the reception area. Ray looked agitated.

"What's wrong?" Steve asked Ray.

Ray said nothing. Instead, he firmly guided Steve back to the reception desk. Then Steve watched as Ray made an ally and a memory. The first thing Ray did was shake hands, show his charismatic smile, and say, "Good morning, Melissa, I'm Ray. I'll be the new COO. It's so great to meet you!"

After introducing himself, Ray launched into a dialogue with Melissa. "How *long have you* been with us?" "How did you hear about us?" "What did you do before you joined our firm?" "What kind of dog is that in the picture?" "What do you think of this business we're in together?" The collaborative language was infectious. It communicated that Ray and Melissa were together in an enterprise as equal partners.

Nor did the questioning go just one way.

Ray asked Melissa if she had any questions. He waited. Eventually, Melissa did ask a couple of questions, and Ray answered them candidly. Melissa was clearly delighted with the exchange.

Finally, Ray said, "Well, really nice to meet you, Melissa. Keep doin' what you're doin'. "We need you. I look forward to seeing you next time I'm here." And with that Ray and Steve went inside to meet the rest of the staff.

As the team exited the reception area, Steve asked Ray, "What was that all about?"

"Steve;" Ray said, "that's called the two-minute schmooze! Receptionists meet or talk by phone to more people critical to our company in one month than you or I could ever meet during a year: people at all levels, from all our branches everywhere, our customers, our suppliers, our colleagues, our bosses, our applicants, and job seekers. Most of all receptionists *talk to each other*. Melissa and the dozens like her at the firm serve as nothing less than our concierge desk. They are a key part of our reputation. And anyway, it's just the decent thing to do."

The decent thing to do. Of course, Steve had heard those words before, but hadn't put them in a work context in such a focused way. Ray's two-minute schmooze is how Steve first learned of the power of small decencies, and it's a perfect illustration of decent leadership and the impact it can have on organizations.

Sometime later Steve authorized receptionists to have business cards with the job title: Manager of First

Impressions.

Lee Hecht Harrison is now a global organization with office around the world; The LHH Division of Adecco, the world's largest job placement agency, based in Switzerland.

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