

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Good Behavior by Decree? How A Simple Contract Can Motivate Employees to Create a Kinder, Gentler (More Prosperous) Workplace**

*Yes, you can legislate good behavior. Quint Studer, author of Wall Street Journal Bestseller Results That Last, explains how to create and use a Standards of Behavior contract that boosts morale, customer satisfaction, and profitability.*

**Gulf Breeze, FL (February 2008)**—Consider the things your employees do that you wish they wouldn't. Allison, for instance, chews gum—loudly—when she's on the phone with customers. Calvin consistently forgets to turn off his cell phone at critical times. (Last week it burst into a rousing chorus of "It's a Small World" during an important meeting with potential investors from China.) And Joshua's tendency to aggressively share his religious and political views creates a palpable tension in the office, particularly during election season. None of them are bad employees, but they *do* have bad habits that irritate customers and coworkers alike.

If you assume there's nothing you can do about such all-too-human flaws and foibles, think again, says Quint Studer. You *can* legislate good behavior—and what's more, the vast majority of employees will be glad you did.

"Don't assume people will feel that you're infringing on their rights when you create a set of behavioral rules," says Studer, author of *Wall Street Journal Bestseller Results That Last: Hardwiring Behaviors That Will Take Your Company to the Top* (Wiley, October 2007, ISBN-13: 978-0-471-75729-0, \$24.95). "Most of them are as irritated by the offenders as you and your customers are. Besides, most people appreciate 'official guidelines'—it eliminates their own confusion as well as that of their coworkers."

You might assume that, say, knocking before entering someone's office is a "common sense" behavior. But it's not always. For people who grew up in a family with lots of siblings, few bathrooms and even fewer boundaries, knocking on doors might feel like needless formality. In other words, common sense is a subjective concept, depending in part on an individual's

background. Still, it's very important that every employee display behavior that's consistent with company standards and aligned with desired outcomes.

“Obviously, you want employees to leave a positive impression on customers,” says Studer, who is best known for using evidence-based leadership to help companies “hardwire” leader behaviors that effect culture change and create lasting business results. “And it's also important for morale to have everyone behaving in appropriate ways. Employees who frequently behave in ways that their coworkers deem inappropriate are certainly not contributing to a happy, unified, productive team. And here's the real bottom line: if you don't spell out which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, you can't hold people accountable for them.”

Studer's solution is simple and amazingly effective. He recommends that organizations develop a “Standards of Behavior” contract and have everyone, from CEO to receptionist, sign it. This document can address any and all aspects of behavior at work: from interaction with clients to phone etiquette to “good manners” (knocking on doors) to “positive attitude” markers (smiling or saying *thank you*).

Interested in creating a Standards of Behavior contract for your company? Studer offers the following tips:

- **Seek input from all employees in creating the document.** Put together a “[Service Standards Team](#)” to spearhead the initiative and create the first draft. Just be sure that everyone has a chance to review the document and provide input before it's finalized. *Do not* have Human Resources write it and impose it on everyone else. You want to create buy-in, and that requires companywide participation.
- **Align desired behaviors with corporate goals and desired outcomes.** Before you start writing, take a look at your organization's long-term goals and areas that need improvement. You must be able to measure the success of your standards by seeing an impact in many of the key metrics of your operation, whether those are increased customer satisfaction, reduced rejects, or other measures.
- **Be crystal clear and very specific in your wording.** *Don't* write “Display a positive attitude.” *Do* write “Smile, make eye contact, and greet customers by name.” *Don't* worry about insulting people's intelligence. Sometimes people really, truly don't know what is appropriate behavior and what isn't. For instance, if you don't want common “slang” phrases used with customers, you need to identify them right up front. One Standards of Behavior document created by a Studer client contains the phone etiquette directive: *Avoid phrases like “OK,” “Yeah,” “Hold on,” “Honey,” and “See ya.”*

- **Hold a ceremonial Standards of Behavior “roll out.”** Once you have finalized your Standards of Behavior document, it’s time to implement it. Hold an employee forum or companywide meeting in which you introduce the standards and distribute pledges for everyone to sign. You might want to create an event around your CEO and leadership team signing the pledge. You may even hold activities designed to educate employees about some of the points. Make it fun. But *do* have everyone sign a pledge—it’s amazing how much more seriously people take rules when they’ve signed on the dotted line.

- **Hold people accountable when they violate a standard.** Make sure all employees know they’ll be held accountable for the behaviors outlined in the Standards of Behavior document. Then, just do it. *How* you hold them accountable is up to you. Sometimes a simple meeting in which you show an employee the signed pledge and point out her error is sufficient. Other times, you might need to write her up or take more drastic disciplinary measures. But one thing is clear: the Standards of Behavior pledge gives you something to hold people accountable *to*. It’s worth implementing for that reason alone.

- **Create a designated “Standard of the Month.”** Every month, highlight a specific standard. This will boost awareness of the standards in general and will get people thinking about how that specific one applies to their daily lives. Let’s say, for example, that you decide to focus on your policy for dealing with disgruntled customers. At the beginning of the month a “reminder” e-mail detailing the policy is sent out. Next, you might ask employees to write up real-life or hypothetical scenarios in which they must deal with angry or dissatisfied customers. Finally, you might hold a companywide forum in which you recruit people to “act out” both sides of a conflict: the disgruntled customer and the employee trying to soothe her. Not only is this fun and often hilarious, it can be a valuable learning tool, as it forces people to see both sides of an issue.

- **Update the Standards of Behavior.** The standards are dynamic and will need to be updated from time to time. One or two directives may not work as intended and may need to be changed. You may also discover new standards that need to be added as your company grows and evolves in new directions. Make changes as necessary. Your Standards of Behavior should be a “living document” that serves your company . . . not the other way around.

- **Have new applicants sign it right up front.** Before you even interview prospective new employees, have them read and sign your Standards of Behavior. You will be able to eliminate people from the race up front if they visibly balk at conforming to your corporate culture. But more important, when you *do* hire someone there will be no doubt in his mind what you expect of him. If he is going to have trouble meeting your standards, you will probably know during the initial “probationary” period.

Studer says just knowing that a Standards of Behavior document exists—and knowing that their signature is affixed to a pledge to uphold it—is enough to keep **average** employees on their toes. It creates an extra boost of awareness that really *does* affect day-to-day behavior. **It creates the same behavior expectations for the entire team.** Best of all, it functions as a tidal pull on problem employees, bringing them up to a higher level of performance.

Obviously, when overall performance improves, so does the quality of your products and services, the satisfaction level of your customers, and—last but not least—your profit sheets.

“You may worry that enforcing Standards of Behavior will create a company of robots—a company in which human differences are discouraged in favor of mindless conformity,” he writes in *Results That Last*. “That is not true! An office unified by agreed-upon standards is a far more pleasant place to work. Plus, individual responsibility flourishes, because it’s clear what everyone’s responsibilities are. That contributes to an environment of fairness, cleanliness, and good manners—and happy customers who keep coming back for more.”

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