



By Quint Studer

# GOOD BEHAVIOR BY DECREE?

## How a Simple Contract Can Motivate Employees to Create a Kinder, Gentler (More Prosperous) Workplace

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. And Calvin consistently forgets to turn off his cell phone at critical times. Neither of them are bad employees, but they do have bad habits that irritate customers and co-workers alike.

If you assume there's nothing you can do about human flaws and foibles, think again. You can legislate good behavior. 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. Most of them are as irritated by the offenders as you and your customers are. Besides, most people appreciate having official guidelines as it eliminates their own confusion as well as that of their co-workers.

You might assume, for instance, that knocking before entering someone's office is common sense behavior. For some people, knocking on doors might just feel like a needless formality. In other words, common sense is a subjective concept, depending on an individual's background. Still, it's important that every employee's behavior is consistent with company standards and aligned with desired outcomes.

Obviously, employees have to leave a positive impression on customers. It's also important for morale to have everyone behaving in appropriate ways. Employees who frequently behave in ways that their co-workers deem inappropriate are certainly

not contributing to a happy, unified, productive team. 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.

My solution is simple and effective. I recommend that organizations develop a "Standards of Behavior" contract and have employees sign it. This document can

write: display a positive attitude. But instead 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 Group client contains the phone etiquette directive: Avoid phrases like "OK," "Yeah," "Hold on," "Honey," and "See ya."

**Hold a 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 meeting to introduce the standards and have everyone sign

it. 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 the error is sufficient. Other times, you might need to write up the employee or take more drastic disciplinary measures. But one thing is clear: The Standards of Behavior pledge gives you something to hold people accountable for. It's worth implementing for that reason alone.

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address any and all aspects of behavior at work – from interaction with clients and phone etiquette to good manners (knocking on doors) and positive attitude markers (smiling or saying thank you).

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

**Align desired behaviors with corporate goals and desired outcomes.** Consider 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.** Don't



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**Create a designated “Standard of the Month.”** Every month, highlight a specific standard. This may boost awareness of the standards in general and will get people thinking about how that specific one applies to them. Let’s say you decide to focus on your policy for dealing with disgruntled customers. At the beginning of the month, send out a reminder e-mail detailing the policy is sent out.

**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 or modified. You may also discover new standards that need to be added as your company grows and evolves in new directions. Make changes as necessary.

**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.

**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 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 staff. Best of all, it functions as a tidal pull on problem employees, bringing them up to a higher level of performance.

**When overall performance improves, so does the quality of your products, services, the satisfaction level of your customers, and most importantly your profit sheets.** An office unified by agreed-upon standards is a far more pleasant place to work. Plus, individual responsibility flourishes, since 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.

*Quint Studer not only teaches it, he has done it. After leading organizations to breakthrough results, Quint formed Studer Group, an outcomes firm that implements evidence-based leadership systems that help clients attain and sustain outstanding results. He was named one of the “Top 100 Most Powerful People in Healthcare” by Modern Healthcare magazine for his work on institutional healthcare improvement. Studer was also named “Master of Business” by Inc. magazine. He is the author of BusinessWeek bestseller Hardwiring Excellence: Purpose, Worthwhile Work, Making a Difference; 101 Answers to Questions Leaders Ask; and Wall Street Journal bestseller Results That Last: Hardwiring Behaviors That Will Take Your Company to the Top. For more information, visit [www.studergroup.com](http://www.studergroup.com).*