

SERVICE PLUS™ g3

A RMG Training Company White Paper

Reinforcement:
An Indispensable Skill in Sustaining Service Quality Success

By Bob Brown, President, RMG Training Company

207 E. Georgia Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85012
Phone: 602.240.6066
Fax: 602.240.6061
www.serviceplustraining.com

An essential element in sustaining a vibrant service quality culture is for staff to repeat successful service performance well into the future! The best service quality leaders use the invaluable and often underutilized skill of effective reinforcement. The purpose of reinforcement is to *MAINTAIN SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE* to facilitate the consistent performance of the staff. If employees are effectively reinforced by their leaders, they are far more likely to repeat the same service quality behaviors the next day and the next month! A central theme of this paper is for employees to repeat the same successful behavior, while it is best to reinforce such behavior in very specific terms. If the performance is only reinforced with general comments such as, *“Keep up the good work,”* employees will not clearly understand the specific skills that you want their team to repeat in the future.

Let's begin with some helpful tips to guide leaders regarding *WHEN* to use the skill of reinforcement:

- Reinforcement should occur *ONLY* as a result of an employee performing successfully what was expected, based on performance goals established with the employee.
- Reinforcement should be specific and job related. We'll discuss this in detail later in the white paper.
- Reinforcement should occur soon after the achievement occurs. If the reinforcement occurs a week or two after the success was achieved, the positive impact is lost.
- Reinforcement has the greatest impact on employees when they actively participate in the reinforcement discussion. This achieves future buy in by employees to repeat their successes!

The communication steps to reinforce successful performance are:

1. Greet Employee and Define the Purpose of the Conversation
2. Identify the Accomplishments
3. Ask for Specific Results
4. Ask for Comparison of Results to Expected Performance
5. Express Thanks and Encourage Continuation

We'll now review each of these communication steps in more detail.

1. Greeting and Purpose – A Focused Beginning

When you reinforce an employee's performance, your initial words should extend a positive *GREETING*, using the person's name, and should *DEFINE THE PURPOSE* of the conversation. Here is an example of an effective greeting that clearly defines the purpose:

“Becky, I would like to give you some positive feedback about the referral you just made.”

2. Identify the Accomplishments – Clarify the Specific Skills Performed

The employee will repeat desired behavior in the future only if his/her performance is reinforced in specific terms. Instead of just saying, *“You did a great job,”* you should describe specifically *WHAT* the employee *ACTUALLY DID* that made it a good job! If your comments are too

general, you may unknowingly reinforce the wrong behaviors. Specific comments, on the other hand, inform the employee that you know exactly what was accomplished and what performance you would like to see the person consistently repeat in the future. Adding this step, the communication would be like this:

“Becky, I would like to give you some positive feedback about the referral you just made. You really did a good job. I really liked the fact that you provided Mrs. London my name and even wrote my name on your business card for her. You then called me to explain his need and arranged for him to come right over to my desk.”

Here are several “pat on the back” examples of feedback that are non-specific and general:

- *“You’re so nice to customers.”*
- *“Good job on the phone today.”*
- *“Thanks for your help this morning.”*

There is nothing wrong with providing “pat-on-the-back” feedback if you take it a step further. To help employees better understand their true performance successes, always add specifics. For example:

- *“You’re so nice to customers. You used Mr. Miller’s name three times in your conversation with him.”*
- *“Good job on the phone today. Your call with John included several open-ended questions to clarify his needs. The answers to those questions helped you deliver quality service in a short time.”*
- *“Thanks for your help this morning. I appreciate it when you let me know when you have finished a project and are ready for another.”*

These specifics provide the employee a true picture of their accomplishments that are likely to repeat in the future!

3. Ask For Specific Results – The Impact

Now that you have identified the successful performance with the employee, it’s now time to emphasize with the employee WHY the skills the person used are so valuable. By asking the employee to identify the results of his/her behavior, the employee will clearly understand the value or impact of the successful performance. This brief discussion will also give the employee the opportunity to relive the service event. This step is accomplished by asking questions like these:

- *“Becky, what results for the office were achieved by resolving the customer’s complaint?”*
- *“And Becky, what impact does your ability to resolve customer complaints have on you?”*
- *“How did your work with the customer affect newer employees who overheard the discussion?”*
- *“If you had not used the SERVICE PLUS skills to resolve the complaint, what would the customer have probably done?”*

Instead of simply telling the employee the positive impact of their successful performance, have a discussion with the employee by asking questions. This really helps people understand WHY

their successful service performance is so beneficial to them, to customers, to other employees, and to the organization!

4. Ask for Comparison of the Results to Established Objectives

The purpose of this step is to remind the employee of pre-determined job standards or objectives. This provides the person the opportunity to reflect and recognize that the performance successes help achieve established performance objectives. This step also develops a strong sense of pride and job satisfaction. Here is an example of a question asked to compare the success to an objective:

- *“Becky, how do these results you achieved compare to your performance targets for referrals?”*

5. Express Thanks and Encourage Continuation

In this wrap-up step, you let the employee know you appreciate the extra effort by saying THANK YOU and encouraging the employee to repeat the behavior. The conclusion to the reinforcement communication looks like this:

- *“Thank you for making such an effective referral. I hope you continue to use these skills with customers. Making effective referrals helps you provide exceptional service to your customers.”*

Reinforcement is easy. It only takes a minute or two to accomplish. Yet, it yields the enormous return of maintaining a vibrant service quality culture for you and your staff at your organization! Use these reinforcement guidelines and communication techniques to motivate your employees to achieve repeated service quality performance successes!