The Great Employee Handbook

Making Work and Life Better

Quint Studer
The following pages are excerpted from the book titled

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It is provided as a sample of the book’s content in order to give the reader a sense of what the actual book is like.
I wanted to be a productive worker. And in spurts I was. Notice the word *spurts*. The first step to being more productive in work and life was to make sure my own head was on straight. This journey began in December of 1982 when I turned my life and will over to the care of God as I understood him. I am grateful for the Grace of God and the Friends of Bill W.

The next blessing was my marriage to Rishy in 1984. Her steady belief in the journey and steady support of my taking the risk to leave a secure job for the unknown made possible what impact I have. Thank you, Rishy, for always being here for me.

I want to thank my father. From day one he demonstrated a great work ethic, having worked for General Motors for 41 years in a variety of roles. I am grateful to my mother for talking about her work as a nursery school teaching assistant each night at dinner. It left an impression on me
regarding the impact that a supervisor has on a person—and not just at work. People take bosses home. Children hear the conversations. The impact of a work environment stretches far beyond the workplace.

Of course, my appreciation also goes out to my five wonderful children: Quin, Rebecca, Katye, Mallory, and Michael. I have felt so much support from all of you.

Thank you to the many coworkers over the years who tolerated my own growth as a worker and to those who still have patience with me today.

Lastly, I want to thank the many of you who have taken time to learn and to share what you’ve learned with me and with others. We are all students of life. We are all teachers.

My hope is that this book will be helpful to you in preventing some situations that could prove painful, in reinforcing you are on the right track, and in helping you in your work life and your outside of work life.

Thank you to the many organizations that do their best to create great places for people to work. I have learned that like there is no perfect person, there is no perfect workplace. We are all on the same journey, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of life.
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Most of us want to do a great job. I really believe that. But often I find we get into situations we just don’t know how to handle. After all, there aren’t many formal training programs that teach people how to figure out what matters most to a boss (and deliver on it), or how to manage competing projects that both have tight deadlines, or how to respond to a gossipy coworker.

The answers to problems like these usually come from experience. It really is the best teacher. There is a magical time many people naturally reach when our emotional maturity, intellectual capacity, and work experience come together and allow us to handle situations that previously would have baffled us. The goal of this book is to help readers get to that point earlier. It’s the book I wish was around in my own career.

My father retired from General Motors at the age of 60, after 41 years on the job. If I had talked to him back then I think he could probably have solved many of the
problems I talk about in this book. But who wants to wait until they’re ready to retire to know how to be happy and successful at work? And who can afford to?

Today we don’t have the luxury of a lot of time to figure out how to get it right. New employees, for instance, have to hit the ground running and show value right away. (Long onboarding (orientation) processes and learning curves are as much a thing of the past as working for the same company all your life and retiring with a gold watch.)

And then, once we become experienced employees, we have to keep showing our value every day. It’s a reality that comes with working in a rapid-fire business world in an unforgiving economy.

I’m not saying the new way is bad. Actually, it’s energizing and deeply rewarding. But it does require far more of an “ownership” mindset than the old way did. Fortunately, there is a lot individuals can do to change their workplace for the better—if only someone gives them the tools that are proven to work.

I have been fortunate enough to work with thousands of employees at various levels inside many organizations. I have observed all sorts of challenges employees must deal with on a day-to-day basis. I’ve seen what works and what doesn’t. I’ve been mentally collecting all of this knowledge for years and I finally decided to turn it into a book.

*The Great Employee Handbook* is meant to help readers achieve their own potential, to become happier and more successful at work, and to positively impact the lives of
those around them. And though I am best known for my work in healthcare, this book is written for people in all industries, in all kinds of organizations, and at all levels.

I hope it will provide a good foundation for helping new employees “onboard” quickly and will also help seasoned professionals think about issues they may be struggling with from a new perspective.

You’ll see there are chapters on working best with the boss, with coworkers, and with customers. Chapters have been kept short. (I know I’m often too busy to read big, thick chunks of information and I suspect you are, too.) Also, I’ve tried to explain the why upfront every time. I find that when people understand why they’re being asked to do things in a different way—when they understand why it works and that it does get results—they are far more willing to make the change. In fact, they want to.

If there’s one overarching lesson that applies to every tip in the book, it’s simply this: We can’t change or control other people, but we can change and control ourselves. Leaders have always asked me “How can I fix this department?” or “How can I fix this person?” The answer is sometimes we can’t.

But I find that when I stop focusing on fixing others and start working on myself, sometimes the others change for the better right along with me. (Positivity spreads just like negativity.) And we as individuals always become much happier and more successful when we focus on ourselves. (The maturity of a person and even an organization can be measured by how much time they
spend fixing themselves rather than worrying about fixing others.)

I’ve also learned that when people take responsibility for their own happiness and success, opportunities open up. There was a time in my career when I tried to escape from an unhappy situation by finding a new job. I applied for a lot of positions and went on a lot of interviews. But I think interviewers sensed I was unhappy and did not want to hire an unhappy person.

So I made a decision: Due to my unsuccessful exit plan, I would spend the next year working really hard on doing the best job I could do. Just throwing my heart into my work made me a happier employee. (It also made the people around me happier.) Lo and behold, I ended up getting the next job I interviewed for. It was a job I really wanted, and years later, after several career milestones had been achieved, it led to my starting my own company.

When one works hard to maximize their own potential—to be the very best employee they can be—they’ll find themselves a lot happier on the job. That’s really what this book is all about. There is no utopia or happily ever after—there are bad days in every workplace—but overall you can be fairly happy where you work most of the time.

I’m a firm believer that when we’re happy with where we work, we’re happy when we leave work. When we’re happy when we leave work, then we make better spouses, parents, friends, and members of society. That means not only do we improve the quality of life for ourselves, we
also improve the quality of life for our families and the community. Not bad for a day’s work!

Quint Studer
Section One:

Working Best with Your Boss
Execution has always been a challenge for companies. As workplaces get more and more complicated, it’s harder to execute than it’s ever been. And in a tough economy, it’s an issue that can mean the difference between survival and failure.

As companies streamline their operations and look for ways to get more efficient, being known as a person who gets things done will serve you well.

So how well do you execute? Do you take quick, decisive, meaningful action day after day? Or do you often find yourself waiting on someone to give you your next assignment, redoing your work, or missing important deadlines?

If you seem to have trouble executing, there could be many possible reasons. For instance, maybe a coworker won’t get you the information you need. Or you’re a perfectionist who can’t stop “improving” your work and just get it done already. Or your to-do list is too long. Or when
the project gets to you there isn’t enough time left to do your part.

These issues exist inside organizations. But great employees don’t let them become excuses. After all, whether you save lives or sell cars or build websites or cater parties, your job is to do your job. To execute. That means coming to work on time and ready to take action. That means meeting deadlines and being a team player. That means really “owning” the job and doing what’s necessary to overcome the obstacles.

It’s true that in the past employees got a lot more guidance. But in a fast-moving, ever-changing global economy, most leaders don’t have a lot of time to nurture people and monitor their work every step of the way. And that’s why people who can work independently are so valued.

When you are a skilled “executer” you play a vital role in moving your company forward. You make life easier for leaders and everyone else. Rather than being a bottleneck, you’re a facilitator. You’re the rocket fuel that keeps the company moving ahead of the competition.

Here are a few tips to help you become a great executer:

**Do the important things first.** Often I find we let small, urgent tasks eat up the entire day. When 5:00 rolls around, we’ve barely started on the items that really matter. Don’t let this happen. For example, rather than spend your entire morning answering all of your flagged e-mails, respond to only those that are emergencies, so that you can get started on the big items at the top of
your to-do list. By tackling what matters most first thing and making good headway on critical tasks every day, you’ll be less likely to find yourself in a desperate situation as the deadline approaches.

**Keep your to-do list in front of the boss.** In an economy where things change quickly, companies frequently have to take a step back and recalibrate. Something that was critical last week may have dropped to second or third place this week. That means it’s a good idea to be proactive about making sure the boss knows what you’re working on.

Don’t assume that they’ll let you know when it’s time to change gears. Situations change and sometimes the boss doesn’t have time to brief you. Maybe what you’re doing is now obsolete, and the boss simply doesn’t remember giving you the task.

When you show your to-do list to the boss, be sure to prioritize your tasks using an A-B-C method, with “A” tasks being the most important and “C” the least important. That way they easily see what your emergencies are and/or can help you reprioritize if necessary. If you’re not in a position where you feel comfortable prioritizing your own list, ask the boss to do so for you. You might say, “I think Item 1 is the most urgent, but please let me know if I should move another task in front of it.” It’s your responsibility to ensure that you’re working on the right things at the right time—and prioritizing and frequent reminders are the best way to make that happen.

**Make sure you really understand the project.** Sometimes at the start of a project people are not clear
on what the outcome needs to be or what their role actually is in making it happen. As a result they may feel uneasy so they procrastinate. Or maybe they go down the wrong path and end up having to rework. Either way, lack of clarity is a major enemy of good execution.

The remedy is simple: Ask questions until you’re sure you understand. Don’t just clarify what your role is; ask about the why. Once you know the thinking behind the assignment, you’ll not only be more likely to buy into it, you’ll be able to ask intelligent questions and make the right adjustments. Good execution isn’t just following orders and going through the motions; it’s getting to the outcome in the best possible way.

**Think it through upfront.** What is the shortest distance from A to B? If you figure out the most efficient path from the beginning you’ll greatly speed up the process. (Otherwise you might end up zigzagging through C, D, E, and F before you ever get to B!) Don’t assume that just because something has “always been done this way” that it’s the best way. Maybe things have changed inside the company or in the external environment that make the old way obsolete.

Thinking the project through early on allows you to do a better job of anticipating potential problems, setting deadlines, and planning your tasks. If you know that you are going to be out the week before a finished project is due, you’ll know to: a) set an earlier deadline for yourself so that you get your portion done before you leave, b) make sure the project point person knows your schedule, and c) ask for items that you know you’ll need ahead of
time. In other words, even if you aren’t quite ready for the data your coworker Jim is gathering, ask him for it now or let him know when you’ll need it so that he will get it to you on time and everything can keep moving smoothly. This will keep you from making a lot of frantic last-minute requests—requests that derail other people’s (equally important) work.

Remember, most projects are organic, not linear. Very rarely will you move sequentially from Step 1 to Step 2 to Step 3 and so on. Most likely, you’ll be working in tandem with a team where each individual is working on a portion of the project. Be sure you’re never the hold up. Keep your team leader and coworkers informed about what you’re working on and when.

**Keep it simple.** Don’t go through unnecessary steps or get people involved who don’t really need to be. Make sure you know who your point person is, whether it’s the boss or a coworker who is heading up a certain project. Run your questions through that person and that person only. Don’t complicate things by asking coworkers questions they might not have the answers to or that might confuse them and what they’re working on. Think carefully about who you need feedback from before you ask. Too many cooks in the kitchen rarely results in a delicious meal!

**Assume the ball is always in your court.** When you’re assigned a task, do what you need to do to move it forward quickly. Don’t ever let yourself be the holdup.

Sometimes, you may encounter a true roadblock that stalls your progress. If this happens and you can’t solve
the problem, go to the boss immediately and let them know what’s going on. They may have a quick solution. But even if they don’t, they’ll know you are doing your part to keep the project moving. The idea is to tell the boss about it before they have to ask.

**Don’t let a few missing details hold a project hostage.** Sometimes people may assume they need to have every last bit of information in order to get started on a project. This is not always true. (And if we’re perfectly honest, many of us would have to admit it’s a form of procrastination!)

It’s often possible to complete big chunks of the project without the missing information. Make it a point to do as much as you can as early as you can without compromising the overall quality. (On the other hand, you don’t want to do so much guessing that you end up going miles in the wrong direction!)

Finally, set deadlines with coworkers for when you need certain information and send persistent reminders. Depending on the situation, you might even let them know they are holding up the project. Don’t assume they know.

**Kick the procrastination habit.** Volumes have been written on procrastination. It’s true: There are many theories about why people put things—*important things*—off. In my mind, knowing why we procrastinate isn’t nearly as critical as resolving to overcome the habit. Procrastination is a true enemy of good execution.
I have noticed this: When people really focus on completing a tough task instead of coming up with a million reasons not to, they quickly realize the payoff of “just doing it” far outweighs the momentary relief that comes from avoiding the painful task.

**Do everything you can to make sure you deliver on time.** Yes, there are times when deadlines cannot be met, but make it your goal to be sure such times are few and far between. One missed deadline leads to another and another and another. Before you know it, you’ll have a difficult-to-improve reputation for being unreliable.

That said, if you need to work through the occasional lunch or stay late once in a while to meet a deadline, it’s okay (as long as you have the boss’s permission to do so!). Putting in those few extra hours is well worth missing out on the headaches they’ll save later.

**Don’t let perfection be the enemy of execution.** Many people work and work on a project and never seem to feel it’s good enough to deliver. In an effort to “get it perfect” they miss deadlines, lose sight of the big picture, and, ironically, undermine their own success inside a company. The time and energy they spend obsessing over every last detail is almost always better spent on moving on to other tasks.

The truth is, in many cases 90 percent is good enough and 100 percent is overkill. No one is going to notice the last 10 percent of effort—and it’s often that 10 percent that makes the project late enough to irritate the boss (or worse, the customer).
I’ve heard it said that life rewards action. I believe it. People who are more geared toward “getting it done” than toward analysis paralysis and perfectionism are always the most successful people. And a whole organization full of them is unstoppable.
Do you want to make your workdays smoother, easier, and more productive? Most of us do. And there’s a secret to achieving this goal that does not require a huge change in behavior. Learn what really matters to your boss—what their what is, in other words—and really laser-focus on meeting their needs in this area. It will make their job better, and that, in turn, will make yours better.

The best way to explain the what principle is this: Everyone has one or two defining actions or attributes that outweigh all others in their mind. That includes you. Maybe your what happens to be punctuality. You just can’t stand it when people aren’t on time or when deadlines get missed. It ruins your whole day and keeps you from doing your best work.

Well, the boss has a what as well. Maybe theirs is that people proactively tell them when something goes wrong, rather than leaving them to hear about it later. Or maybe
it’s positivity—hearing employees griping, complaining, and expecting the worst pushes the boss’s buttons like nothing else.

When you know the boss’s what and pay attention to it, you’re able to create a productive relationship with them. When you understand what makes the boss tick—and what makes them crazy—you can work with them smoothly and efficiently. They’ll be happier with your work and quite frankly they’ll like you more.

The best news is that it doesn’t require a huge shift in your behavior—it’s probably a matter of making a few tweaks in what you’re already doing.

Of course, you won’t be able to make the boss happy 100 percent of the time. It’s not humanly possible. But when you know what matters most to them, you will be able to consistently meet and surpass their expectations—and this can have a dramatic positive effect on your own work life.

By the way, this is not meant to be a self-serving exercise. Yes, it will benefit you in many ways. But it will also benefit the boss, your coworkers, and the entire organization.

Here are a few things to consider when striving to meet the boss’s what:

**Pay attention.** Who in your organization seems to have the smoothest, most productive working relationships with the boss? What are these people doing that seems to strike a chord with them? When has the boss been most pleased with your performance—and what
led to this approval? On the other hand, what sorts of actions or behaviors seem to irritate them? Be mindful of these patterns and their implications. It’s amazing what you can learn when you simply pay attention.

**You don’t have to guess. Just ask.** If you’ve been avoiding asking the boss about their *what* because you’re afraid they’ll think you have no idea what you’re doing, put your mind at ease. They will almost certainly appreciate any effort you put into making their job easier and your department as a whole run more smoothly. Simply ask, “What is the one area that you would most like me to place an extra focus on?” Then, take the answer to heart. By asking, you take the guesswork out of your job and ensure that you are attacking those tasks that matter most to the boss—and in the manner they find most helpful.

**Keep in mind that there are also secondary *whats*—and these can change.** Your boss’s primary *whats* are more permanent—they’re associated with their character, work style, and personal preferences. But they have secondary *whats* too, and these change depending on what’s going on in your organization’s external environment and what kind of pressure the boss is under. Recognize what is going on in today’s external environment. Understand that things are constantly changing and learn how those changes will affect the boss and the organization as a whole.

For example, sometimes their secondary *what* might be doing everything you can to reduce expenses. Other times it might be following an initiative put in place to improve customer satisfaction. The bottom line is that
you’ll want to follow up frequently with your boss to find out their *what* of the month or year.

**Ask the boss how you can help them deliver on their boss’s *whats***. It’s very likely that your boss has their own set of higher-ups to answer to, and those higher-ups have *whats* of their own. Ask how you can help them deliver on those tasks and initiatives that are important to their boss. This will provide you with yet another opportunity to form a great working relationship with them and to put in great work that earns their respect.

One way to do this might be to make suggestions as to what tasks you can take off the boss’s plate. For example, offer to handle finding an employee to cover the shift of someone who has called in sick. Or tell them you’ll be happy to start ordering supplies so they no longer have to. When you make suggestions, the boss can give you quick approval, and then get back to work delivering on their boss’s *whats*.

**Spread the word.** More likely than not, delivering on the boss’s *what* is going to take more than one person. That’s why it is so important that you get others on board. Inform them about your boss’s *what* and work with them to find ways to meet it. Also, warn them if they’re about to violate a *what*—you’ll be doing them a valuable service.

It’s the pursuit of the *whats*—for both bosses and employees—that moves organizations from good to great. When you know each other’s *whats*, you can better meet
one another’s needs. And when that starts happening, everything gets better and better.

Get the *Whats in Writing*

You might suggest to the boss that they write down what matters most to them. I do this for employees at Studer Group. I find that they appreciate knowing exactly what I expect from them and how I prefer them to work. Here is a document that I distribute to all employees:

How to work with Quint:

1. **Show me materials very early in the process.** Fancy is not good. Material does not need to be in covers, slick, illustrated with graphs, etc. I like to see things early so we can discuss if you are on the right track. This works like a GPS. If looked at early, the driver can stay on the right road. If we wait too long to check the GPS, the driver and passengers can be lost, and it can take extra time and money to get back on track.

2. **Be specific.** Don’t generalize by saying things such as “The coaches are saying…” Do not generalize. We teach other leaders not to accept it and I won’t. It’s better to coach
people on specific problems as they occur than to wait three months and say, “You never do such and such…” When we’re specific and when we act in the moment, we have a much better chance of fixing the problem.

3. **Act like an owner.** Spend money like it is yours.

4. **Bring a solution.** Pointing out a problem is better than not pointing out a problem. Don’t wait to be led. For example, a coach recently showed me a much-improved system for orienting new staff. I loved it. She was not asked to do this; she just was thinking about how introducing new team members to SG policies, materials, tools, and processes could be done better. She wrote her ideas on a piece of paper and said, “What do you think?” This to me is excellent leadership.

5. **Write me if you have a question.** One day I received two e-mails that were about what to do if an organization is not showing gains in patient satisfaction. This allowed me to write my thoughts to many in a tip fashion. So by sharing my written response, each coach can help many. (Just please follow up
with a phone call if you don’t hear back from me within 24 hours.)

6. **If I ask for comments, questions, and/or concerns, while you don’t need to respond every time, do respond when you can.** This helps me know if the message was received and if the receivers understand or want to share their own viewpoints. For example, on an expense note, four people wrote me with ideas they feel would work or with concerns on what may come. These were helpful. Sadly, many of you have never responded. I notice.

7. **Tell me some positives about SG and most importantly our people.** Trust me: I usually hear what is wrong, who spent too much, who did not complete an assignment, etc. I need the 3-to-1 “positive-to-negative” ratio just like everyone else. Plus, I pass the positives on to others.

8. **Say it early.** Make your main point, suggestions, or return on investment statement in the first sentence on notes to me.

9. **Don’t wait.** If you are going to not make a deadline or miss a target, or if you have an
issue, tell me. It is better for me to be told by you than to realize it later. For example, if a 90-day plan is due and you have not turned it in, you know it. If I have to ask, then I am thinking, *What else have they not done and not said anything about?* It creates anxiety. Talk to anyone who has worked with me a long time and you will find that saying something is much better than waiting to see what happens. If the results are not there, say something. Maybe we can help.

10. **Think and communicate horizontally.** This is a difficult one. By this I mean if you are doing something that is working, ask yourself, *How can I show this to others at SG who may find it helpful?* This is called teamwork. Also, you may find you have a tool, technique, or system that will help others.

11. **Control your own destiny.** If you feel we are not talking enough, call me. Ask questions. When it’s convenient and cost effective, shadow me.

12. **Come to me directly.** At times I find people will tell someone I talk to often something in hopes that the other person will tell me. It’s best to carry our own messages.
13. **Keep me in the loop on material and work.** Not that I am checking, but I can sometimes use what you’re doing in talks or in helping others or in pointing out what you can send to others to help them achieve success.
Section Two:

Working Best with Your Coworkers
A workplace relationship is a lot like a marriage or a friendship: It’s based on give and take. If you’re a good spouse or a good friend, you probably make an effort to “give” most of the time: You try to make life easier and better for the other party. You’re considerate and respectful, you clean up after yourself, you remember birthdays, you show up on time for lunch dates.

However, because no one is perfect, there will also be times you “take.” Perhaps you snap at your spouse because you’re tired. Or maybe you miss your friend’s daughter’s wedding because you accidentally scheduled your vacation at the same time.

Hopefully, because you’ve made an effort to do the right thing 90 percent of the time, your friend or spouse will be willing to forgive the other 10 percent. This is called building a strong emotional bank account: You make as many deposits as possible so that when you have
to make a withdrawal the balance is still in your favor and
the relationship doesn’t crash.

The same principle holds true in the workplace. It’s
important to do everything you can, every day, to be the
best employee and coworker you can be. Why? Because,
inevitably, you will make a mistake and let the boss or a
coworker down or you’ll need to ask for a favor.

By working hard to build trusting, productive, and
positive relationships with others in the workplace, you
ensure there’s enough emotional capital in the account to
cover these metaphorical rainy days.

Basically, building a positive emotional bank account
means doing what we can to make others in the work-
place happy most of the time, in anticipation of those
future times when we might, carelessly or unintentionally,
let them down.

A few tips for building up your workplace
emotional bank account...

Ask what you can do to improve. One way to
make emotional bank account deposits is to reduce the
risk you’ll need to make an unexpected withdrawal. Ask
people for honest feedback on how you can work better
with them. Be sure to implement their suggestions and
follow up to make sure the changes you make have af-
fected them positively.

Go for “quick wins.” Bring your cubicle mate a
cup of their favorite coffee. Offer to take your cowork-
ers’ trash out when you’re taking out yours. Congratu-
late them on a job well done. Recognize an important
milestone like a birthday or anniversary. Cook a meal for a coworker’s sick mother. Bring in a bag of cute clothing your kids have outgrown and give it to others who have younger children. These are all great ways to get quick wins, which translate into emotional bank account deposits.

**Give credit when credit is due.** When someone has a big win, make a big deal out of it. Congratulate the coworker personally, but also make sure everyone else knows they have done a great job. It will make them feel great, and that will make them feel great about you. Managing up the people you work with is a powerful way to make emotional bank account deposits—it provides a lot of bang for the buck.

**Ask for their input.** People like feeling valued. They like knowing that their opinions and thoughts truly matter. A great way to make deposits in coworkers’ emotional bank accounts is to ask for their input on a problem you might be having. For example you might say, “Bob, I really admire how you handle your clients. I’m having a problem connecting with Client X. What do you recommend?” Showing Bob that you value his opinion will make him feel great, which will translate into positive feelings about you.

**Be open and honest.** Always tell the truth, avoid office politics and gossip, and never be two-faced. You’ll build credibility and trust, both of which are like having an accruing investment in an emotional bank account. When leaders and coworkers trust you, their good opinion of you will only continue to grow.
...And a few more for making withdrawals:

**Apologize sincerely when you mess up.** If you’ve made a mistake that is going to make someone’s job a little harder—for example, if you’ve missed an important deadline or screwed up their client’s order—before you do anything else, it’s best to apologize. Acknowledge that your mistake is making their job more difficult and then offer to do whatever you can to make things right.

Don’t ever point fingers or try to redirect the blame. Doing so will only mean a loss of credibility with coworkers, which will result in more emotional bank account withdrawals.

**Show your gratitude.** Whether you screwed up and need to be bailed out or had to miss work three days in a row because your child is sick, the end result is the same: Others had to step in and help you out. Be grateful. Follow up the help you’ve received with a thank-you note and make sure coworkers know that you know you couldn’t have solved the problem or mistake without their help.

**Follow up your withdrawal with a “pay back” gesture.** If someone really went the extra mile to help you out of a jam, reciprocate. Take a tedious task off their hands or offer to edit the marketing report they’re putting together. You might even want to give them a token of appreciation, like a gift card to a local spa or shop.
Ultimately, the emotional capital you invest in coworkers and leaders helps strengthen your relationships with them. You don’t have to be a math person to see how the formula works. Your deliberate, daily deposits will all add up to the perception that you like them, value their contributions, and want them to succeed—and your occasional withdrawals will barely make a dent.
Has this ever happened to you? It’s 4:30 and you’re putting the finishing touches on your monthly report. Things are clicking along pretty well, and you’re feeling good about making the 5:00 deadline. All of a sudden, the phone rings. It’s your co-worker Barbara asking you to take “just a quick look” at the newsletter that needs to go to print today.

A sinking feeling washes over you. (You’ve been down this road before with Barbara and you know what’s coming.) Sure enough, as you scan the newsletter you see that several key points are missing. There is not enough time to fix this and meet the printing deadline. Also, even if you could get the needed changes made in time, you’ll end up either missing your own deadline or delivering a (far) less-than-perfect finished product.

It’s a dilemma. You don’t want to drop the ball on your report—but you also don’t want to be responsible for letting a substandard newsletter go out.
If last-minute requests happened only once in a while, it wouldn’t be such a big deal. The problem comes when you find yourself dealing with chronic offenders. Whether you have to deal with one coworker who does this or a whole office full of them (sometimes it’s a company culture issue), “last-minute requesters” tend to interrupt your train of thought and interfere with your results.

Fortunately, you can deal productively with people who’ve gotten into the habit of making last-minute requests and even “retrain” them. This will help you do your best work.

Helping coworkers who make last-minute requests change their work styles will make them more efficient and productive. This allows them to form better relationships with you and others.

Read on for a few tips on how to handle excessive last-minute requests:

**Hold up the mirror. What kind of message are you sending?** Often, a last-minute request feels excessive because you’ve already got 30 other things on your plate. At other times, let’s say when you’re having a slow day or when you’ve just tied up the loose ends on a couple of big projects, a last-minute request doesn’t seem like that big of a deal. At those times, you might happily help a coworker with a last-minute request. As a result, the next time that person drops the ball on something they’ll think, *Well, Sarah helped me last time this happened. I’ll just ask her to do it.*
Chapter Seventeen: Minimize Last-Minute Requests

*What you permit, you promote!* Think about the precedent you’ve set with your past behavior. If you’ve taken on last-minute requests, done them, and never indicated that this is a problem for you, then you’ve reinforced that it’s okay to do it.

Essentially, you trained them to think last-minute requests aren’t a problem for you. If this is the case, then you’ll have to start the groundwork for changing these behaviors with yourself and with your coworkers.

**Put a request system in place.** One way to prevent excessive last-minute requests is to put a process in place that gives people a protocol for making requests and lets them know how long certain tasks take. If you don’t have the authority to put the process in place, you can ask your leader to help you. (They will appreciate your thinking it through and taking the initiative.)

At one organization where I worked, HR was being criticized for taking too long to approve new hires. When new hires were chosen, they would always have to go to HR for a drug screening, physical, and other checks. The managers doing the hiring would get upset because this process always took a couple of days and they needed the new hire in place right away. But the reality was that sometimes these managers were sitting on the hires until just a few days before they wanted them to start working. They thought HR wasn’t being responsive to their needs, but HR thought these managers were coming to them at the last minute and putting a rush on a process that took time.
To solve the problem, we made a rule that as soon as a manager wanted to make a hire they were to send the person to HR, and HR would get back to them within 72 hours. By putting a process in place, we were able to put everyone on the same schedule so that no one was being rushed and no one felt like the ball was getting dropped. It helped everyone work together more harmoniously.

**Educate people on how long a task takes.** Often, when certain tasks don’t ever fall under a person’s job requirements, they may underestimate how long they take to complete. They may think something is very simple to do when in reality it is complex and involves a lot of steps or a lot of coordination between departments. For example, the Sales Department might want the Marketing Department to put a flier together for a conference that is happening in two days. What they might not realize is that in addition to writing the copy and designing the flier, there are also copyright and trademark issues to handle. Plus, printing will take a certain amount of time.

In my own experience, I’ve seen this dynamic inside hospitals. A patient might be waiting in the ER to hear about lab work. They might think the lab is dragging its feet on getting the results, when in reality, it can take two hours or more for certain tests to be done. We would explain this time issue to a patient by saying, “Sir (or Ma’am), your cultures will need to sit for a certain amount of time in order for us to get a valid result. I want you to know the process will take two hours.” This would ease the patient’s anxiety and allow them to have realistic
expectations. They weren’t just left in the waiting room, watching the clock, wondering, *What is taking so long?*

In your job when you receive a last-minute request, it’s okay to say, “I am going to get this done as quickly as possible, but I want you to know that first we’ll have to get Legal’s approval, and then the printer will take at least one business day to print this number of fliers.” Now the coworker knows what to expect, and that in the future they should allow more time for this kind of request.

**Use collaborative problem solving.** Once you’ve explained exactly what you have on your plate and exactly how long the task will take, and your coworker has told you exactly when they need the task completed, it’s time to implement some collaborative problem solving. There might have to be some give and take between you and your coworker. For example, you might have to say, “In order to do it right, I can have it to you by the end of the day tomorrow. But in order to meet that deadline, I’ll need your help doing this, this, and this.”

Of course, it’s possible that you’ll already be working on a project that is more urgent than theirs. Let the coworker know when you’ll be able to tackle their issue. Maybe you can tell them how to get their project started so that when you’re free you can hit the ground running, or maybe you can suggest another coworker who will be able to help them.

When all is said and done and the dust is settled, ask to meet with the coworker. Make sure they understand that the task they brought to you will *always* take X amount of time. Explain that you’re happy to help them on these
projects, but that you will need X amount of notice to make sure you can complete the task by the deadline. Again, setting these parameters will help you both work better together.

**Set consequences.** Work with the boss to set consequences for all those who make last-minute requests. At one organization where I worked, every new employee had to go through an orientation program. They couldn’t begin work without the orientation because it created a liability situation for the organization. Orientation sessions were regularly held every other Monday, and everyone knew this. Every now and then a department manager would have a new employee starting at the organization who hadn’t yet completed orientation. We couldn’t allow the new hire to start without doing orientation, so the manager would be upset. He’d say, “Well, then I’m going to have more overtime.” We’d have to explain that because he waited until the last minute to make arrangements for the orientation, he missed out on allowing the new hire to start on the right date. We held tight on this every time it happened. It became a “what you permit, you promote” teaching opportunity. Eventually, the behavior stopped.

If you go back to the flier example from above, let’s say the rule was that all marketing materials had to be approved internally before they could be used externally. The consequence might be that the flier is prohibited from being used until the right people have signed off on it. When you hold steady on these consequences, people will begin to change their behaviors.
**Reward and recognize.** Take a look at the employees who are always considerate of your schedule and do the proper planning to meet deadlines. Do you ever thank them for doing so? Or if this has been a problem with a coworker but they’ve made changes in their behavior to do better, have you recognized and rewarded this change? If not, then it’s important that you start because behaviors that are recognized and rewarded get repeated.

For example, if a person who has in the past always given you last-minute requests doesn’t this time, then after the task is complete go to them and say, “You know what, Mary (or Ralph or whomever), I want to tell you how much I appreciate you giving me plenty of notice on the Acme assignment. With everything going on right now the fact that you gave me ample lead time will make my work life better and will lead to a much better product for our client. Thank you.”

Handling excessive last-minute requests essentially comes down to planning. Sure, on occasion, a situation will pop up where a last-minute task has to be completed, but by and large, issues can be avoided when the right amount of planning is done on the front end. Keep communication open with coworkers and work with the leaders at your organization to make sure that everyone is on the same page and knows the protocol for completing important projects.
Section Three:

Working Best with Your Customers
Winning customers and keeping them happy is difficult. That means everyone needs to be engaged in building the organization’s brand, and it needs to happen with every customer interaction. It used to be that this level of dedication and engagement was a “nice to have.” Now, it’s a “must have.”

Managing up the company is all our jobs.

You’ve seen managing up before. When you go to a nice restaurant, the server doesn’t just point to a blackboard with the daily specials. Instead, they say, “I tried today’s pasta special before my shift and it’s fabulous.” Or when it is time for dessert, she says, “Gee, I don’t know if you know this, but our executive chef was trained in New Orleans at Commander’s Palace. That’s who is creating our desserts today.”

That’s managing up. It’s very powerful. When the server positions the restaurant, the food, and the chef in a positive light, you order with great anticipation. You
probably enjoy it more than you would have if the server had described it in a neutral way. And you walk away feeling good about your decision to visit that particular restaurant.

Managing up works in any industry. In an upscale clothing store it’s when the salesperson says, “We’ve really got some great new summer styles this season. Our buyer is fantastic—he is from Milan and has that famous Italian eye for fashion.” In a hospital it’s when the nurse says, “Dr. Harris has been a gastroenterologist for 20 years. He does this procedure hundreds of times a year. His patients love him and I know you will, too.”

It will work for your organization, too. Essentially, it means saying positive things about the company’s products and services, others in the organization, and of course the organization itself. At Studer Group, we help clients learn how key words at key times work so that managing up gets hardwired into a company’s culture—but as an individual you can do this on your own.

Managing up the company and its offerings works on several levels:

• Most obviously, it helps you see the product or service you’re trying to sell.
• It alleviates customer anxiety. Your customer wants to know that doing business with you is a good decision. When you say great things about your company and your coworkers, you make them feel that they are in the right place with the right company.
• It helps the customer form a positive opinion of the company. When you say “This is the best accounting firm/dentist office/car parts manufacturer/ad agency in the business” people tend to believe it more than if you just let the product or service represent the company. (Remember the restaurant example?)

All of this, of course, is good for you. What you’re trying to do (depending on your job, of course) is make the sale or keep the customer happy—and hopefully create a return or long-term customer.

Managing up also makes your job easier because a happy customer is a lot more pleasant to work with. The rave reviews you’ll get from customers will surely impress the boss. Coworkers, too, will appreciate the positive things you say about them.

Finally, managing up is a powerful form of “self-talk.” You’re not just selling the customer on the company; you’re selling yourself on it. You’re reminding yourself why you like your job, and that positive attitude will help you stay engaged and dedicated.

If you’re not used to doing it managing up can take some getting used to. Here are a few tips to get you started:

**Be authentic.** If you aren’t sincere when you are managing up the company, the customer will see right through you. Most people can sense “fakeness” from a mile away. Find something positive you really believe in to say about the product or a coworker.

If all else fails you might fall back on positive things other customers have said about your company. For
example: “We have one customer who’s a caterer and shops exclusively in our Kitchenware Department. She says the cookware we sell is the best in town and even though it may cost a little more the lifetime guarantee makes it money well spent.”

*Narrate* the sales process or the service provided. When Studer Group works with healthcare organizations, we teach people to explain what they’re doing as they’re doing it. When they understand why a nurse is doing what they’re doing, they perceive their care as far better than if the nurse had just silently performed the procedures.

The same is true for your job. When you explain why you structured your contract the way you did, or why you have to do a credit check or why a product has a particular feature, people will think more highly of your company. People always want to know *why*. When they don’t, they assume the worst.

Don’t ever make a *“we/they”* statement to a customer. This is especially an issue if a customer is disgruntled or complaining. You might think you’re building a rapport by agreeing with the customer that another department is disorganized or that another employee has a bad attitude—with the implication being “But don’t worry; *I’ll* take care of you!”— but really all you’re doing is further hurting the company. The customer thinks, *They’re a nice employee, but I’m never doing business here again.*

Don’t “manage down” the competition. Yes, it can be tempting to “bash” your company’s competitors but it’s usually best to resist. It comes across as
unprofessional, plus, you never know who you’re talking to—what if their spouse or sister or best friend works for the company you’re badmouthing? Take the high road and you won’t regret it.

**Manage up the company when you’re off the clock, too.** When you’re out in the community—especially if you’re wearing a nametag or uniform but even if you’re not—talk positively about who you work with and where you work. You’re a representative of the company 24/7. (And thanks to social media that’s literally true. Facebook never sleeps—and what you post there lives in cyberspace forever.) People hear what you say off the clock and take it to heart. It certainly influences their thoughts about the company and you.

When I lived in a town where a major carmaker was located, I used to hear employees jokingly say, “Don’t ever buy a car that was built on a Friday or Monday because on Fridays we are getting ready for the weekend and on Mondays we are just coming back from the weekend.” Now, I know they were joking, but still it certainly didn’t make me want to run over to that company’s dealership and buy a car. Watch what you say off the clock, and when you know you have people’s ears, deliberately manage up the company.

In the end, the power of this technique comes from one central truth: People respond to positivity. They like positive people and they like hearing positive things about what they’re spending their hard-earned money on. Positivity smoothes the sales process and keeps customers coming back to your organization again and again.
By mastering the art of managing up, you become an ambassador of positivity—and you and your entire organization will reap the benefits.
Think about your favorite “service” person. It may be the mechanic who works on your car or the woman at the dry cleaner you entrust your favorite garments to or the pharmacist who fills your prescriptions. Now imagine that you go for an appointment or show up at the store only to find that the person you’re used to isn’t there—and that you’ll be dealing with someone entirely new.

Here’s another variation on the same theme: You’re in the hospital following a minor procedure and you’ve gotten to really like the awesome nurse who’s taking care of you. Just as bedtime rolls around, lo and behold another nurse takes over…and you’re not at all sure you’re comfortable with this change.

Most people in business call the event when Employee A turns over care of a customer to Employee B a “handoff.” Personally, I prefer the term “handover.” (To me, “handoff” seems to imply that an employee is completely
done with the customer, when often, that isn’t the case at all.)

Handovers aren’t unusual. We’ve all experienced them. But admit it—when a handover happens, you feel a twinge of anxiety. You probably don’t think, Oh good, a new employee! I’ll bet they’re even better than the one I usually see!

In fact, you most likely expect the worst.

No doubt about it: People like familiarity. We’re happier inside our comfort zones. So it’s no wonder customer handovers are so tricky for companies.

It’s just a fact that when one person is in charge of a particular customer things go more smoothly. That person’s “institutional memory” of the customer’s account and their likes and dislikes is incredibly powerful. That’s why customer handovers are “moments of truth” for any organization.

Handovers may be where mistakes happen, balls get dropped, and misunderstandings reveal themselves...or they may be where an organization’s true excellence and devotion to service shine through.

In today’s world it’s less and less likely that the same person will handle every customer interaction. Business happens across different geographic locations, different time zones, even different continents. Combine that with the “24/7” expectations of today’s customers and there’s no way around it—handovers are the norm.

That’s why it’s up to everyone to make sure they happen smoothly. Ensuring that customers experience good
handovers goes a long way toward countering knee-jerk negativity and low expectations.

Remember, to customers, everyone they come into contact with is “the company.” In their minds, you aren’t Mary or Julio or Alexander. You’re the face of the company. No matter how much a customer likes you, if they don’t like the person who helps them after you, they process that as not liking the company as a whole. And that’s the biggest why I can think of for making sure handovers happen as smoothly as possible.

A big part of good handovers involves proactively passing along information that will help the next person best serve the customer. This is actually a process that starts long before it’s time for the handover. A few suggestions:

Pay attention to the customer’s what. Everyone has a what. Your customers’ what will vary but they’re the one or two things that must happen in order for them to be happy with your company. One customer’s what might be to handle all communication over the phone rather than by e-mail. Another customer’s what might be always receiving updates about their account on Tuesday.

Whatever the what is for a customer, paying attention and responding to it is not only a cornerstone of great service, it’s a key element in handovers. When you hand over the customer to another employee, you emphasize the importance of always meeting that what. (Learn more about this topic in Chapter 25—“Know the Customer’s What.”)
Keep good records of customer preferences. You probably know your customers’ likes, dislikes, and other nuances pretty well. (Yes, this includes their respective *whats* but also goes beyond them.) For example, one of your biggest customers might hate being called on their cell phone after 5:30 p.m. because they don’t want their family time interrupted. By keeping detailed and updated records of these preferences, you’ll be prepared to share that vital info with the next customer service person to prevent them from inadvertently doing something the customer doesn’t like.

If possible, do handovers in the presence of the customer. This is a technique commonly used in healthcare. (If you’ve ever been in the hospital, you may have noticed that the outgoing nurse shares all the pertinent information about you with the oncoming nurse at your bedside.) The practice works well in any industry.

Conducting handovers in the customer’s presence (in person or on the phone) has many benefits.

1. It allows the employee the customer is already comfortable with (Employee A, also known as you) to introduce the new one (Employee B).
2. By telling the customer’s story to Employee B, you keep them from having to do it themselves. (Customers get frustrated when they have to explain the same thing over and over again.)
3. When you share information in front of the customer, you give them the opportunity to jump in and correct you if you happen to say the wrong thing.
4. It also allows them to ask questions on the spot and for you to hear Employee B’s answer. This allows you to speak up if your coworker misunderstands something or to set them on the right path later if you hear them say something you know won’t sit well with that customer.

**Manage up the employee you’re handing the customer over to.** Handovers are also perfect occasions to manage up coworkers. Any time you pass a customer on to another department or another team member, you can view it as an excellent opportunity for managing up, which will go a long way toward alleviating the customer’s anxiety.

For example, my daughter’s battery is running out and the car won’t start. I jump the battery and drive the car to Whibb’s Automotive. The front-desk person, Bob, listens to my problem and says, “Mr. Studer, we’re sending your car to Bay 7. Steve is our mechanic today. He will check out both your battery and your alternator. I want you to know that Steve is a certified mechanic. In fact, when it comes to fixing the alternator, Steve is one of the very best people we have in this entire garage.”

Now, I’m thanking Bob for giving me to Steve, and I’m already genuinely happy that Steve’s fixing my car. See the power of managing up? Obviously, you don’t want to tell a customer something that’s not true. But I find that most of the time we do work with talented people who know what they’re talking about—we just don’t think to relay that to customers.
If a customer is already upset, think twice about handing them over to someone else. When dealing with an already angry customer, it might be better to handle the rest of his transaction yourself, even if it’s outside your job description. Passing them off to a coworker, even if that is usually how things are done, will probably upset them even more and may lead to them leaving the company altogether. By continuing to work with the customer, you can build a rapport and hopefully gain their trust.

If you are Employee B in the handover, make sure to ask Employee A for information on how to please the customer. The coworker may not always volunteer the information so take the initiative and ask. If they can’t think of anything, you might want to ask some probing questions. For example, you might want to find out the customer’s preferred method of communication, whether they like to be called by their first name or addressed more formally, etc. These are the little things Employee A might take for granted and forget to convey to you. It always helps to ask.

Of all the organizations I’ve worked with over the years, I’ve found that most have excellent employees in every department. Unfortunately, if the transition from one department to another isn’t handled properly, customers never realize it. One bad handover experience can ruin their impression of an entire company.

You as an individual can go a long way toward changing this reality. Putting a little extra effort into handovers will help you become a more valued employee, will set
the next employee up for success, will make the customer happy, and will strengthen the organization as a whole.
Thank you to the many who over the years have shared your work, challenges, and solutions with me. Your trusting me made this book possible. I have great respect for the men and women who really make work work.

Like some of you, I have experienced the internal pain of being in a job that just is not working. Looking back I have had those “aha” moments in which things crystallized. While grateful I got it, I also wished I could have gotten it sooner. That brings me to my goal with this book. I hope it helps prevent some situations that could be painful, and provides you with a set of tools to make your work better. When we like our work, lots of other things outside of work seem to improve.

I have spent a great deal of time with individuals in administrative/managerial positions. Sure, there are some who should not be in these positions. Still, for the great majority, they are people who each day do their
very best work. One does not know how difficult a job role is until they’re in it. Thank you for taking on these roles. You have a key impact on those you supervise.

I have found employees take their boss home. The family knows who you are. They know what their spouse or mom or dad thinks of you.

Once when a person introduced me to speak at a large conference he said, “Quint Studer has received lots of awards.” My statement when I began my talk was that the best award a person can receive is when people go home and tell their family, “I work for or with a good person.” That is the pebble that impacts every drop of water in the pond.

Each person’s role is important. Please don’t ever underestimate the difference one person can make. That person may very well be you.

I am grateful you took time to read this book. I hope our paths cross someday. Please don’t hesitate to go to the Studer Group website at www.studergroup.com or write me direct at quint@studergroup.com.

Thank you.
Quint
Quint Studer is founder of Studer Group®. A recipient of the 2010 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the outcomes firm implements evidence-based leadership systems that help organizations attain and sustain outstanding results.

During the course of his 27-year career, Studer has spent countless hours creating, harvesting, and sharing best practices from his company’s “national learning lab” of hundreds of organizations. He has worked with thousands of employees at every level across a variety of industries. During this time he has identified and studied the specific skills that make people productive, influential, and efficient—and it’s this knowledge that makes up The Great Employee Handbook.
Studer is the author of six books. His first title, *BusinessWeek* bestseller *Hardwiring Excellence*, is one of the most widely read books in healthcare. More than 400,000 copies of this groundbreaking book have been sold. His second book, *101 Answers to Questions Leaders Ask*, offers practical, prescriptive solutions to some of the many questions he’s received from healthcare leaders around the country. *Results That Last*—written to teach non-healthcare leaders how to apply Studer Group tactics and strategies to their organizations—hit the *Wall Street Journal*’s bestseller list of business books and is currently in its seventh printing. *Straight A Leadership* teaches senior leaders how to create organizations that can execute swiftly and well in response to a rapidly shifting external environment. Most recently (before writing *The Great Employee Handbook*), Studer coauthored *The HCAHPS Handbook: Hardwire Your Hospital for Pay-for-Performance Success*.

*Inc.* magazine named Studer its Master of Business, making him the only healthcare leader to have ever won this award. Twice *Modern Healthcare* has chosen him as one of the 100 Most Powerful People in Healthcare. He is frequently asked to serve as a guest lecturer at institutions of higher learning, to speak to a wide range of audiences across the U.S., and to share his expertise with TV viewers, radio listeners, and magazine and newspaper readers nationwide.

Studer and his wife, Rishy, are residents of Pensacola, Florida. Passionate about giving back to the community, they share their time and resources with local and national non-profit organizations.
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The Most Valuable On-the-Job Skills Come from Experience—But You Don’t Have to Work a Lifetime to Master Them.

Often, it’s the day-to-day issues, those not found in any training manual, that keep us from being our best at work. We’ve all looked back on challenges we’ve faced—whether they involved a boss, a coworker, or a customer—and thought, *If I knew then what I know now, I would have handled that in a completely different way!*

The old saying “Experience is the best teacher” has probably never been more true than in the workplace. But what if you could learn those important workplace lessons *without* having to go through the pain yourself? That’s the idea behind *The Great Employee Handbook.*

*Wall Street Journal* bestselling author Quint Studer has pulled together the best insights gained from working with thousands of employees during his career. The high-impact tips he shares will help you more productively handle those situations every employee finds difficult (and get them right the first time). You’ll learn how to:

- Put your best foot forward in the first 90 days
- Build an emotional bank account with coworkers (It’s the best way to get quick forgiveness when you mess up!)
- Discuss your own development plan without looking self-promotional
- Have difficult conversations with your boss
- Solve problems and resolve conflicts without getting the boss involved
- Alleviate customer anxiety so they’ll buy from you (and keep coming back)
- And much, much more

Studer has created a valuable tool for companies in every industry. We all know a good day at work means a good day in our personal lives, too. That positivity is what employees—and the leaders who count on them—really want.