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**PROCESS QUALITY ASSOCIATES INC.**

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*"We engineer the quality of your success"*

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**Supplier-Customer Relationships:  
Make Sure Each Nonconformance Is Corrected**

With each nonconformance, suppliers should be asked about the corrective action they will take. They should be able to provide answers to these questions:

- What caused the nonconformance?
- What changes in the process need to be made to achieve correction?
- When will these changes be implemented?
- How will these changes be made foolproof?
- How will the customer know the changes have been made?

It is the customer's responsibility to ensure that the supplier works to find the root cause of each nonconformance and takes the necessary action to permanently eliminate the cause. The role of the supplier in quality improvement is critical. For the supplier to achieve improvement, the customer must demand it.

**Positive Reinforcement:  
Be Personal**

Make reinforcements as personal as possible. Following are 3 ways to personalize reinforcement:

- **Face-to-face** is clearly the most personal. Explain exactly what he or she did, how the effort contributed to continuous improvement, and why you appreciate it.
- **Over the telephone.** It can be a quick, "Bill, I know you're busy, but I just wanted to let you know that we appreciate all your team did to help us get that press back up. You're doing more than your share on this total quality effort and I really appreciate it."
- **Handwrite a note** on the bottom of a just-received quality report, or on a letter from a customer, or just any piece of paper.

A personal touch strengthens teamwork and builds relationships between employees throughout the company.

**Shift From Firefighting To Prevention**

Chronic quality problems are created by management's inappropriate action: by its emphasis on quick fixes and its focus on the short term. For successful quality improvement, the emphasis must shift from firefighting to preventive work. Prevention anticipates what can go wrong, finds the root causes, finds ways to eliminate the causes, and modifies the QA system itself to lower the probability of the problem's recurrence.

**Frontline Employees Must Be Empowered To Do A Good Job**

To extend the best possible service to customers, the people on the frontline must have the authority, resources, and training to resolve problems and satisfy customers.

Many well-meaning company policies can rob employees of the ability to do what might be in the best interest of both the customer and the employee. For example, by not allowing an employee to refund a customer's money on a small-ticket item, a company might lose a customer who spends hundreds or thousands of dollars with the company annually.

Companies need to train, empower, and then reward employees for frontline problem solving. Federal Express empowers employees to make decisions and solve problems right away as they see fit. They are allowed to take the appropriate risks to keep the customer's business and they are not penalized for the occasional error because Federal Express believes that well-intentioned efforts are just as important as successes.

Studies of 50,000 employees have found that the degree to which a company's frontline employees believe they have the capability, tools, and organizational support to provide for customer needs, mirrors the degree of customer satisfaction. The more empowered the employees, the higher the level of customer satisfaction.

**A Frontline Employee Has The 4th Most Stressful Job**

This, according to the American Institute of Stress who published their "Top 10 Most Stressful Jobs" list.

The most stressful job in America is an air traffic controller, followed by inner-city high school teacher, and police officer.

The rest of the top 10 are: newspaper editor, medical intern, commercial pilot, single working mom in any field, intensive care unit staffer, and stockbroker.

**H O N E S T Y**

A common fault among managers is their unwillingness, inability, or fear of being honest with employees about performance, particularly negative performance. Honesty involves giving employees information. Information is the single most nurturing element in any organization. Honesty is the key to a productive workplace.