Practice for Excellence, Path to Success

Connections Leader's Guide

The Noel-Levitz Quality Service
Training Program for Staff

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Contents

Introduction 1

Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do 29

Section 1: Making First Impressions Lasting Impressions 33

Warm-up Activity 35

Video Script—Session One, Section 1 37

Exercise 1: Making First Impressions Lasting Impressions 38

Section 2: Welcome to Connections 41

Video Script—Session One, Section 2 43

Exercise 2: Making Connections With a Caring Attitude 44

Section 3: Why Do People Do What They Do? 47

Video Script— Session One, Section 3 53

Exercise 3: Why People Do What They Do 55

Personal Goal Statement 56

Section 4: Feeling Good About Yourself 59

Video Script— Session One, Section 4 63

Exercise 4: Feeling Good About Yourself 64

Video Script—Section One, Session 5 66

Exercise 5: Personalizing Service 67

Section 5: Treating People With Respect 71

Video Script—Session One, Section 6 73

Exercise 6: Treating People With Respect 74

Section 6: The Quality of Your Work 77

Video Script— Session One, Section 7 80

Exercise 7: Consistent Impressions 81

Exercise 8: The Importance of Quality Service 82

Section 7: Doing More Than the Minimum 85

Video Script—Session One, Section 8 87

Exercise 9: Using Positive Communication Proactively 91

Exercise 10: Identifying Common Communication Barriers 92

Exercise 11: Turning Negative Communication Into Positive Communication 94

Video Script—Session One, Section 9 95

Review Questionnaire One: Session One, Sections 1-7 96

Becoming a Partner in Change 98

Session Two: Using the Language of Positive Communication 101
Section 1: What Is Positive Communication? 105
Video Script—Session Two, Section 1 113
Table of Communication Styles 115
Exercise 12: Identifying Positive and Negative Communication 116
Section 2: How's Your Image? 121
Video Script—Session Two, Section 2 124
Exercise 13: Building a Positive Mindset 126
Video Script—Session Two, Section 3 127
Exercise 14: Moving From Negative to Positive Interaction 129
Section 3: What Does the Student Need? 131
Video Script—Session Two, Section 4 137
Exercise 15: Tips for Positive Telephone Techniques 140
Video Script—Session Two, Section 5 142
Exercise 16: Using Voice Messaging and E-Mail Effectively 143
Video Script—Session Two, Section 6 145
Exercise 17: Really Listening Makes All the Difference 146
Rules for Role Play 149
Optional Exercise: Telephone Role Play 150
Optional Exercise: Active Listening 152
Video Script—Session Two, Section 7 154
Review Questionnaire Two: Sections 1-3 155

Session Three: Meeting and Exceeding Student Expectations 157
Section 1: Our Campuswide Commitment 161
Video Script—Session Three, Section 1 163
Exercise 18: Understanding the Nature of Our Promises 164
Section 2: Our Other "Customers" 167
Video Script—Session Three, Section 2 171
Exercise 19: Putting Training and Orientation to Work 173
Exercise 20: Building on Training and Orientation 175
Section 3: Handling Complaints 177
Video Script—Session Three, Section 3 182
Exercise 21: Applying Quality Service Techniques 184
Exercise 22: Responding Positively to Negative Communication .. 186
Exercise 23: Moving From Complaints to Resolution 188
Optional Role-Playing Exercise 189
Section 4: And in Conclusion … 191
Video Script— Session Three, Section 4 193
Exercise 24: Using Tact and Staying Calm 195
Optional Exercise: Role Play—Handling the Irate Student 198
Video Script— Session Three, Section 5 199
Optional Exercise: Role Play—Handling Complaints 201
Group Session Critique Form 202
Follow-up Session: Connections 205

Introduction

Goals and Objectives of Connections 3

Program Components 5

- Videotapes 5
- Leader's Guide 5
- Participant Book Material 8
- Participant Book 8

Leader's Guide at a Glance 9

Preparing for the Sessions 11

The Art of Good Leadership 12

How to Run the Sessions 14

General Leadership Techniques 15

- Leadership Options 15
- The Art of Seminar Questioning 16
- How a Leader Handles Questions 17

The Connections Participant Book—*Practice for Excellence, Path to Success*—Key Element of the Program 18

Sample Letter, Memorandum, or Notice About Connections 19

Outline of the Sessions 20

Connections at a Glance 21

Follow-up Session 24

What's Next? 25

Connections and Advanced Connections at a Glance 26

Optional Exercises 27

Implementation Suggestions 27

Introduction

Congratulations! You're a Connections Group Leader. Now, honestly, you may be thinking, "Why me? Don't I already have enough to do?" Perhaps so, but nothing quite as important as this.

You've been selected to help yourself and those around you to succeed at work and life, and to help your school as well.

If you've never done this before, you're probably a bit nervous. That's natural. There's a good amount of material and probably just a little stage fright. (Generally, most of us feel a bit insecure speaking to other adults.)

Relax! The material is well organized. The participants know less about the material than you do so no one is going to question your knowledge. Besides, the participants do much of the work themselves. Finally, simply leading these sessions will help to overcome that stage fright. When you properly prepare for your role as Group Leader, you'll find people praising how well you've done.

So relax. This is easy, and it's well worth it to you, the campus as a whole, and especially the students.

Connections, a program built around making people feel better about their work and their lives, is a structured approach to improving student relations through increasing staff sensitivity and personal communication skills. The caring attitude of staff is a positive link to student retention. So it is in our best interest to do all we can to provide that care.

Connections will have a strong, powerful impact on the level of quality service your school provides. Support and committed participation from you and your co-workers is essential. This Leader's Guide is designed to provide the tools you need to generate that support.

Goals and Objectives of Connections

Connections was designed to achieve two main objectives:

1. Increase the self-worth and self-image of every person within your school through mastery and daily practice of the Connections philosophy; and
2. Improve your school's position by concentrating on quality service, the key to continued success in the educational community.

The goals of the Connections program are:

- To emphasize that recruitment and retention are everyone's responsibility.
- To increase staff awareness of their importance as recruitment and retention agents.
- To show staff how they are sometimes perceived as unhelpful or inconsiderate, even when they think they are being helpful.
- To show staff how they can directly influence a student's decision to enroll at your school and to remain at your school.
- To illustrate how critical front-line staff are in setting the tone or climate of the educational community.
- To fill the training gap in helping your school improve its overall recruitment and retention efforts.

To achieve these objectives on and off the job, Connections training should be conducted in a systematic, organized way. At the same time, Connections sessions should be relaxed and informal, for you as well as for the participants.

If at all possible, Connections sessions should not be led by an immediate supervisor. Employees find that their relations with the Group Leader, supervisor or not, will be improved by the frank, open approach of the Connections program. They'll appreciate the interest and enthusiasm you bring to the discussions, and they'll translate your interest and enthusiasm into very personal terms. By giving the tangible evidence of your personal interest in helping your co-workers improve themselves, you're showing that you really care about them as people and value their superior staff and student relations skills.

Because Connections training will help all employees, we recommend that everyone be invited to participate—including new and experienced personnel. For best results, schedule the three Connections group sessions no more than one week apart. Plan to take at least two hours for each group session to give participants the discussion time they'll want and need to explore Connections. There's enough material in each group session to give you and your co-workers plenty of stimulation for constructive group discussion. The more everyone participates in the discussions, the better everyone will understand, remember, and apply Connections.

Program Components

The Connections program has three components: 1) three videotapes (totaling approximately 67 minutes for the entire program), 2) a Leader's Guide, and 3) the Connections Participant Book, *Practice for Excellence, Path to Success.*

Videotapes

The three videotapes correspond to the three sessions of the program:

Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do

Session Two: Using the Language of Positive Communication

Session Three: Meeting and Exceeding Student Expectations

Within each session, there are video sections that correspond to the numbered sections of that session. For instance, Section 1 on Videotape One corresponds to Section 1, Making First Impressions Lasting Impressions, in both the Leader's Guide and the Participant Book. Every section of the program has at least one video segment. The tables on pages 22-24 illustrate the relationship of videotape segments, Leader's Guide material, and Participant Book material and exercises.

At the end of each video segment, the facilitator is directed to turn off the videotape and turn to the next exercise or activity.

The videos, shot on college and university campuses, feature realistic, everyday scenes of campus interactions among faculty, staff, student workers, administrators, parents, and students.

Leader's Guide

The Leader's Guide is divided into five parts:

1. Introduction
2. Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do
3. Session Two: Using the Language of Positive Communication
4. Session Three: Meeting and Exceeding Student Expectations
5. Follow-up Session

The introduction provides you with the information you need to get the program up and running effectively at your institution.

The Leader's Guide includes:

- Complete transcripts of all three videotapes
- All assignments, exercises, and in-class activities
- Suggested leader text or key points for the leader to cover
- Sample or likely participant responses to questions and activities
- Implementation suggestions and training hints

For each exercise, the leader is provided with suggested text or key points, the actual text of the exercise questions as printed in the Participant Book, additional follow-up questions, a place for recording sample participant responses to questions, and implementation suggestions.

Order of Material in the Leader's Guide

Each session is divided into sections. Within each section, the material appears in the following order:

1. Participant Book material (taken directly from Participant Book)
2. Video script with approximate running time
3. Numbered exercises (occasionally an exercise or activity also *precedes* a video segment)
4. Optional exercises and activities

Types of Exercises and Activities

1. Numbered exercises follow each video segment. Through discussions and activities, these exercises reinforce and instill the main content of the program and relate directly to the accompanying video segments.
2. Optional exercises and optional activities provide additional learning opportunities. They can take many forms, such as role plays, additional practice with selected skills and techniques, or self-assessments. These exercises and activities can be included in the regular training sessions when time allows, or they can be used in follow-up training sessions.

Please note that the optional activities are not optional because they are unimportant; they are optional because they will add considerable time to a training session. Many of the optional activities such as role plays may be the *best* way for participants to learn the material and to have fun at the same time. However, if you plan to conduct an entire session in 2 to 2 1/2 hours, you may have little or no time for the optional exercises and activities. This optional material can be used in follow-up sessions. Some of the optional exercises and activities can also be done independently by individual participants.

3. Optional follow-up exercises are intended to be used after Connections is completed. Often, they can be used as a focused exercise within an office or department to develop policies and procedures.

Optional activities

The optional activities are not optional because they are unimportant; they are optional because they will add considerable time to a training session. Many of the optional activities such as role plays may be the *best* way for participants to learn the material and to have fun at the same time.

Types of Questions and Assignments

Throughout Connections, the following method is used to distinguish the kinds of questions the leader will ask participants.

- Questions in the form **<Participant Book Question #>** correspond to questions that are written out within numbered exercises in the Participant Book.
- Questions in the form **<Discussion Question>** refer to questions that are *not* written out within numbered exercises in the Participant Book and may include follow-up questions and introductory questions. Participants will *not* have these questions in their books.
- The Participant Book contains **<Assignments>** at the end of several of the reading sections. Participants are asked to complete these assignments as part of the work between sessions.

When going over numbered exercises, the Group Leader is encouraged to refer participants to specific Participant Book questions by question number.

Participant Book Material

At the beginning of each section in the Leader's Guide are several pages of text introduced with the label, "Participant Book Material." This indicates that all of this material is also included in the Participant Book. This label is used throughout the program. The material is reprinted for your convenience so you don't need to flip back and forth between the Leader's Guide and the Participant Book during training sessions.

The Participant Book material is rich in examples, illustrations, and strategies that support and expand upon the video segments and exercises in each section. As a Group Leader, you can take advantage of this material when introducing new topics or when providing answers to participant questions.

Take advantage of the Participant Book

The Participant Book material is rich in examples, illustrations, and strategies that support and expand upon the video segments and exercises.

Participant Book

The Participant Book is the activity guide and resource for each participant who goes through the program. It includes more than 130 pages of techniques, strategies, exercises, activities, and assessments. Like the Leader's Guide, the Participant Book is divided into three sessions. Each section includes introductory and resource information to supplement and expand on material presented in the video segments. Also included are all program exercises and suggested assignments, optional exercises, role plays, etc.

The Participant Book serves as an ongoing reference and resource long after the training is over. By referring participants to specific pages in the book, you create awareness of the wealth of information it contains. Participants are likely to refer back to the step-by-step tips and techniques when needed.

All of the print and video materials in Connections are copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any form.

All of the print and video materials in Connections are copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any form. While it is possible to re-use books, it is not recommended for three reasons. First, staff will miss out on many of the interactive benefits of the program by not writing in the books and using them fully. Second, participants will not be able to take advantage of the benefits of using the book as a reference for quality service principles, tips, and techniques. Third, throughout the program, participants are told repeatedly of their important role in providing quality service and as recruitment and retention agents. This message is undermined considerably if participants feel undervalued by not receiving their own copy of the participant materials.

Leader's Guide at a Glance

The following section provides sample formats of the main components of the Leader's Guide.

PARTICIPANT BOOK MATERIAL: Congratulations on being selected to participate in the Connections quality service training program. Because you are an important member of this educational community, we are inviting you to step back and take a look at yourself and the people you interact with every day. Connections is a program designed to help us learn to excel in delivering quality service with a caring attitude to the students, faculty, and other staff members of our educational community.

Each section begins with Participant Book Material. Everything from the Participant Book is included in the Leader's Guide. Prose sections are introduced with the heading: "Participant Book Material."

Video Script –Session One, Section 6

Running Time: 2 minutes 10 seconds

Narrator: There is more to approaching people in a positive way than just the words we speak and the help we offer. The way you act also shows people that you care about them as individuals. Your attitude toward others becomes obvious very quickly—usually, within a few seconds of meeting them. Body language, eye contact, facial expressions—they're all part of that important first impression. First impressions are usually lasting ones. You may think something like this can't happen here.

Student: Excuse me, I'm looking for financial aid.

The full transcript of the videotapes is included in the Leader's Guide.

LEADER TEXT: The impression we make on others mirrors our attitudes and beliefs. First impressions are lasting. As representatives of the campus, we need to constantly check ourselves to be sure we are making an impression consistent with our role as recruitment and retention agents.

Suggestions for Leader's Text are printed inside shaded boxes.

All exercises from the Participant Book are included in the Leader's Guide.

Hints and notes for facilitators accompany the exercises.

Directions and specific questions for each exercise are enclosed in shaded boxes. Questions labeled "Participant Book," as in "Participant Book Question 1)," correspond directly with the same numbered question in the Participant Book.

Questions are followed by sample participant responses in parentheses, and by one or more blank lines for the facilitator to add additional sample responses or notes.

Exercise 3: Why People Do What They Do

Exercise 3 is found on page 19 in the Participant Book.

Purpose of Exercise 3: This exercise helps participants see the relationship between their everyday experiences as consumers and the way students perceive the services the campus provides.

Participant Book Question 1) In your everyday life as a customer, what motivates you to choose one business over another? Please rate the importance of the following factors:

_____ Cost
_____ Quality of the product or services offered
_____ Location/convenience
_____ Reputation
_____ Physical surroundings
_____ Friendly, caring, and helpful staff
_____ Advice from friends
_____ Service after the sale

(Preferred answers include "service" and "quality" but any answer is acceptable. Keep in mind in setting the tone that there are no *wrong* answers. Participants can begin with a "correct" answer regardless of what they say.)

Would you say that all of these things make up "service"? What's a customer looking for when considering patronizing a business? Every business says it has the best staff, the newest products, the best prices. Don't all of these things go into building an image of quality service?

Participant Book Question 2) Why do you think most students tend to choose our school over another?

_____

_____

(Allow two or three people to respond. They might mention location, course offerings, cost, or friends who attend the school.)

Participant Book Question 3) What makes students stay at this school after they start here?

_____

_____

(Draw the participants out on a variety of answers such as school activities or a sense of belonging. Ask until responses include ideas on relationships and how students are treated.)

Preparing for the Sessions

Conduct all three Connections sessions in a comfortable, well-ventilated room or space, with plenty of light. Select a room that is large enough to allow the participants to stretch out a bit. A comfortable group will be far more receptive to the Connections message. Make sure the sessions are free of interruptions so you and the participants won't be distracted. This is particularly true if you're a manager or a supervisor who tends to have many people trying to reach you. During the Connections sessions you will be creating a learning mood which can be easily compromised by interruptions. Make sure that all participants have pencils and paper.

Locate and test out the videotape equipment that you'll be using for the Connections sessions. Avoid equipment with inferior speakers or poor resolution. Technical flaws like these will distract the participants from the Connections message.

Allow plenty of room for the equipment that you'll need to conduct the Connections group sessions. Even if you know all of the participants on a first-name basis, make name tags or table tents so everyone can see all the participants' names. During the sessions, it's very important to address the participants by name to establish a warm and friendly environment.

Make certain that each participant has his or her own personal copy of the Connections Participant Book, *Practice for Excellence, Path to Success.* You and the participants will be referring to it frequently during the sessions, so be sure to read the appropriate sections and complete assignments before each session.

Ensure that you, as the Group Leader, can be heard by everyone. Speak clearly and distinctly without straining your voice. Don't allow participants to gravitate toward the back of the meeting room.

As much as possible try to hold each Connections session in the same location. Again, the idea is to establish a familiar, comfortable environment.

Finally, take advantage of the Connections draft letter included in this Leader's Guide (page 19). Personalize it to your style. Participants will appreciate written confirmation of their involvement. Moreover, written invitations to participate allow you to control the composition of each discussion group. Ideally, you should structure groups to represent a broad cross-section of jobs, such as full-time and part-time clerks, secretaries and receptionists, custodial and maintenance personnel, food-service workers, student employees, library and technical

staff, administrative assistants, and even managers. Some campuses include faculty as well. The frank exchange of ideas and solutions benefits the entire school, as well as educating everyone in what "the other person" does.

Here's a checklist to follow in planning the effective implementation of Connections:

- ☐ Announce the sessions in written form for a specific time and place. Be sure to start on time and end on time.
- ☐ Select a meeting room where people can be comfortable and not be interrupted.
- ☐ Check the meeting room and the videotape equipment prior to each session. You may wish to use a whiteboard, electronic blackboard, overhead projector, or easel and flipchart.
- ☐ Read the relevant sections of the Connections Leader's Guide and Participant Book prior to the session, including the appropriate exercises.

The Art of Good Leadership

Open the lines of communication

There are no *right* or *wrong* answers to the Connections exercises. The emphasis is on opening the lines of communication and developing an awareness and mastery of the power of excellence in quality service to students and co-workers.

Since you will be conducting the Connections group sessions, a few words about Group Leadership may be in order, especially for those of you who don't do this type of thing on a regular basis.

Above all, you and the participants should enjoy yourselves. Everyone will quickly be at ease in group discussions if the atmosphere is informal. The best way to achieve this atmosphere is to treat Connections as a positive, happy, supportive approach to improving personal skills, because that's just what Connections is. Encourage everyone to speak candidly and freely.

Everyone will have valid points to make, and as the Group Leader, it is your responsibility to make certain that they feel comfortable and free to participate. There are no *right* or *wrong* answers to the Connections exercises. The emphasis is on opening the lines of communication and developing an awareness and mastery of the power of excellence in quality service to students and co-workers.

As Connections progresses, gaining involvement is usually not a problem. People want to participate. But, until that natural comfort level is reached, it's important for you, as the Group Leader, to go out of your way to ensure that everyone participates. This Leader's Guide contains sample questions, virtually a "script," for the Group Leader. These questions for Group Leaders are surrounded by screened boxes, to make them easy to spot. These questions ensure that the group

discussions have maximum impact. Additional instructions to you are printed outside the boxes.

The scripted questions also help you establish and adhere to an agenda for each Connections session. You should not allow the sessions to get off track. As a structured, programmed approach to quality student relations, each portion of each session is important.

If you add material or encourage lengthy group discussions, be prepared to add one half hour or more to each session.

Don't be tempted to take shortcuts or eliminate portions of sessions. Use the Connections materials fully.

It is important to maintain consistency in the content and delivery of the concepts from group to group. This will ensure that all employees who complete the program have a similar (while not identical because of the breadth of different groups' discussions) experience.

Maintain consistency in the content and delivery of the concepts from group to group

This will ensure that all employees who complete the program will have a similar (while not identical because of the breadth of different groups' discussions) experience.

You do not have to repeat the "script" word-for-word. The important role of the Group Leader is to guide the group's discussion into the principles of Connections. The most comfortable way to do that varies with each group and with each Group Leader. As long as the Connections principles are covered fully, feel free to depart from the "script" occasionally.

If you want to depart from the "script," don't just ad-lib. Think about the questions you want to ask, and speak simply and precisely. Remember, you'll be communicating feelings as well as information. Relax and let your personality come through.

Video vignettes provide a foundation for discussion

Make use of the *teachable moments* to reference your campus-specific situations. Create an open forum to identify and refer problems for follow-up action as appropriate.

When leading the discussions, don't bury your nose in the Leader's Guide. Look people in the eye and scan the room while talking. The same applies to listening. When the discussions take off, you'll need to follow along and guide the conversation in the right direction. You can't do that without active listening. It also helps to keep an open mind. Everyone is entitled to an opinion. Remember, there are no *right* or *wrong* answers. The honest exchange of viewpoints is what's right.

Some Group Leaders feel comfortable standing behind a podium to conduct the session. However, this places a barrier between you and the participants. If you wear reading glasses, use them and carry the Leader's Guide as you move close to and interact with the participants. This will permit an easy flowing dialogue you and they will enjoy.

Don't worry about objections, complaints, or disagreements. It's far

more important for you to maintain an open, sharing atmosphere in each session than it is to achieve 100 percent agreement. Allow the group to comment on and to answer objections. By doing so, you'll achieve the objectives of Connections.

Finally, keep the sessions moving. Don't drag them out. By achieving a comfortable, efficient pace, you'll keep participants alert and active. Good leadership requires you to stay on your toes—and a step ahead of the participants.

How to Run the Sessions

First, look for ways to internalize the messages presented in Connections. Use questions relating to problems and situations familiar to the people in your group. Job situations are probably easiest, but don't neglect examples away from the job. The principles of Connections have universal application.

No one person should dominate discussions

Don't allow one person to dominate a session. This kind of domination threatens others, particularly subordinates or those less experienced.

Please keep in mind that the learning process, particularly in a meeting, is very fragile. Don't allow one person to dominate a session. This kind of domination threatens others, particularly subordinates or those less experienced.

Even the best Group Leaders will encounter problems from time to time. But any problem can be turned into an advantage and an opportunity to improve Connections training.

For example, what should you do about a participant who strays from the main topic? Instead of urging him or her to "get back on the track," which produces resentment and rarely works, ask the participant a specific question on the topic under discussion: "George, several minutes ago Jeanne mentioned that she doesn't always know how to deal with students when things get really hectic. What advice can you give Jeanne for those situations?"

How about participants who start arguing? As we've pointed out, you, as a Group Leader, want a frank and open exchange of views. One hundred percent agreement isn't necessary. But you certainly want to avoid shouting matches. To defuse such situations, physically stand between the debaters so they can't see each other. Then, involve the entire group in the discussion by rephrasing the argument. Ask those in the group for their opinions.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, you may have participants who hold back or won't participate. Try asking questions of these people by name. Don't push too hard, but get them to talk about their own experi-

ences and feelings which relate to the Connections topics under discussion. Dividing into small groups for some of the discussions may help participants feel more comfortable sharing their ideas.

General Leadership Techniques

Make certain that your group sees you not as an expert in good student relations, but as a coach or facilitator to help the entire group explore these topics. At the beginning of each meeting, emphasize that each member of the group is free to share personal experiences—good and bad. Suggest that they use the sessions to look for answers to the questions that truly concern them.

You need to build a team atmosphere. Like any team, you and the participants will be more successful implementing the principles of Connections by working as a group, rather than as individuals.

Share personal experiences

At the beginning of each meeting, emphasize that each member of the group is free to share their personal experiences—good and bad. Suggest that they use the sessions to look for answers to the questions that truly concern them.

Leadership Options

As we've discussed, one of the most important things that you as a Group Leader can do to make Connections work is to establish the right atmosphere for the group sessions. Ideally, participants should have fun and feel good about participating. Here are some suggestions of things you can do to create and sustain that atmosphere:

- At the start of Session One divide the group into pairs. Ask the people in pairs to interview each other and then have each briefly introduce the other person to the group.
- In any of the sessions, but particularly in the second and third sessions, it is appropriate to ask participants to share successes. For Connections to work, people must feel good about themselves. To do so, we need to spend time in the sessions focusing on positive events. Have each person share something positive he or she accomplished in the last week.
- At the start of the second session, have participants find three people in the room that they don't usually talk to, and have them give those three people a compliment.
- Have participants list areas of their job or the school that they'd like to know more about.
- Break up into groups and have participants candidly discuss the barriers to positive communication which they, as individuals, find most troublesome.

Increase service awareness

The Quality Service Observer assignments encourage participants to be actively aware of the impact everyday transactions have on staff and students.

- Do the Quality Service Observer reports at the beginning of Session Two. Have participants discuss their observations of outstanding and poor examples of service to students.
- For Session Three, the Quality Service Observer exercise deals with students who are upset or have a complaint.

These are only a few suggestions. The Connections program is flexible, but it does require participation from everyone. As a Group Leader, you know (or will come to know) your participants. Think of things to motivate them and get them enthusiastic. Don't worry about doing something a little silly; after all, Connections should be fun, and a good laugh is a real ice-breaker.

The Art of Seminar Questioning

Ask probing questions

Ask questions and let the participants do the "lecturing" by their answers. Participants learn better when their feelings are involved— not just their intellect.

In conducting these group sessions, try to use open-ended questions that relate to experiences your group may have encountered. Connections is not effectively presented by lecture or directive. Ask questions and let the participants do the "lecturing" by their answers. In this approach, the Group Leader really acts as an interviewer asking probing questions. The participants learn better when their feelings are involved—not just their intellect. There are three steps to achieving that goal:

1. Ask "open-ended" questions, that is, questions that can't be answered by a simple *yes* or *no*. The questions in this Leader's Guide are examples of such questions.
2. Ask open-ended questions to the group in general, any specific person in the group, or to a "team" of persons within the group.
3. Use certain key words, particularly in group questions. For example, ask those in the group to:
    - Tell why something is important;
    - Analyze a situation;
    - Give his or her own story to illustrate a point;
    - Solve a problem; or
    - Explain how they feel.

Remember, when in doubt, or if there is no response (or an inappropriate response), keep asking open-ended questions.

How a Leader Handles Questions

The best way to handle questions from the group is to answer with another question. Remember, the objective is to get participants to interact, and to learn from each other through that interaction. The best facilitator avoids answering questions. Here's how to promote group interaction:

- Return the question to the questioner by rewording it, asking for specifics. For example: "Bill, you asked why saying 'Have a nice day' seems to have a negative effect on some students. Let me ask you to share with us an example of when someone said that to you and it really turned you off." Or: "Chris, you asked why remembering a student's name is so important. Let me ask you how you feel when people you deal with use your name."
- Pass the question to another participant. For example: "John has asked how to deal with student complaints without being negative. Barbara, it seems I saw you doing that just the other day. Can you tell us how you handled that situation?"
- When a participant gives a response that is out of line or opposite the Connections strategy, don't argue or disagree yourself. Ask another participant, who you know would probably have a different approach, for their ideas. For example: "Mike, do you agree with Mary's approach?" or "Kathy, could you give us your opinion on what we should do when we face situations like Tom just mentioned?"

Handling questions

- Return the question to the questioner by rewording or asking for specifics.
- Pass the question to another participant.
- When a response is out of line, don't disagree yourself. Ask another participant who would probably have a different approach.

The Connections Participant Book—*Practice for Excellence, Path to Success*—Key Element of the Program

The Connections Participant Book is designed to explore in much greater detail the points covered in the videotapes and in the group sessions. It is an important part of the Connections program. In some cases, participants will respond far better to the written word than they will to either the videotapes or the group sessions.

As a Group Leader, you must emphasize the importance of the Connections Participant Book to your group members. Certainly, there is no way that you can force them to read the sections or to complete the exercises. At the same time, there are many ways you can encourage them to do so.

- First, read the Connections Participant Book yourself to thoroughly understand the content. It's an invaluable resource for quality service and it will give you ideas to promote discussion.
- In your group sessions, make sure each participant has his or her own copy of the Connections Participant Book. Participants should write their name in the book and complete all the assignments and exercises.
- **At the end of Session One,** assign Sections 1-7 of the Connections Participant Book. Assign Review Questionnaire One. Ask participants to complete the Review Questionnaire and hand it in to you at the start of Session Two.
- The Connections Participant Book includes assignments at the end of Sections 4-6 and Questions to Think About at the end of Sections 3-7. At the beginning of Session Two, take time to discuss some of the assignments and questions.
- **At the end of Session Two,** assign Sections 1-3 of the Connections Participant Book. Assign Review Questionnaire Two at the end of Section 3. Again, ask participants to complete and hand it in at the start of Session Three.
- Review and discuss Chapter Review Questionnaire Two at the beginning of Session Three. Once again, take time to discuss some of the assignments at the end of Sections 1 and 2 and Questions to Think About included at the end of Sections 1-3.
- **One week before the 30- to 60-day Follow-up Session is scheduled,** assign Session One, Section 4; Session Two, Section 1; and Session Three, Section 3; and the Follow-up Review Questionnaire.

- Review and discuss the Follow-up Review Questionnaire during the Follow-up Session. Create additional interest and momentum for using the Connections quality service skills each day. Introduce plans for the Advanced Connections program if your campus will continue with a comprehensive, long-term training program.

Sample Letter, Memorandum, or Notice About Connections

(Note: We encourage you to create a version of this notice on your school letterhead. Personalize it as much as possible. If possible, you may choose to hand-deliver this notice to each potential participant and while giving him or her the notice say: "I want you to seriously consider participating in Connections. You're a valuable member of our team. I think the concept is great! I'll look forward to seeing you there!")

MEMORANDUM

TO: (Potential Participant's Name Goes Here)

FROM: (Your Name Goes Here)

DATE: (Use Today's Date)

SUBJECT: The Connections Quality Service Training Program

This is my personal invitation to you to join us for a series of three meetings on the Connections Quality Service Training Program. It's designed to benefit both you and our campus, and we should have some fun with it, too.

All of us, in one way or another, are important to the success and satisfaction of our students. The way we treat our students creates lasting impressions.

The basic concepts of Connections that we'll be discussing during the sessions can help us in our daily contact with students and co-workers, as well as with our family and friends. There has never been a time when positive, effective communication has been in greater demand! Join us to explore the role you hold in this important process.

We'll hold our first Connections group meeting at _____ (place) on _____ (day,) _____ (date,) at _____ (time) a.m. (or p.m.) Please confirm your availability as soon as possible. If you have a conflict, perhaps we can choose a more convenient time so that you can take part in Connections.

I am looking forward to exploring this dynamic quality service and personal growth concept with you.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Outline of the Sessions

What you'll accomplish in conducting the Connections sessions:

Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do

- Identify why customers decide to patronize a given school or business.
- Use videotaped dramatizations to illustrate the significance of quality service.
- Use videotaped dramatizations to analyze performance with students and co-workers.
- Understand how attitudes are transmitted to others.
- Conduct a participants' inventory of present student attitudes and practices.
- Develop familiarity with positive and negative communication in student relationships.
- Identify and overcome barriers to positive communication.
- Examine our daily need for positive communication.

Session Two: Using the Language of Positive Communication

- Test participants' grasp of positive and negative communication and how to spot it.
- Understand other forms of communication—zero, crooked, plastic, and hostile.
- Identify the consequences of communicating in a negative manner.
- Understand the mastery of self as a pre-requisite to providing good quality service.
- Practice making students feel important—because they really are.
- Learn the "how-to" approach to communicate with students.
- Practice vital telephone techniques.
- Manage voice messaging.
- Review e-mail communication guidelines.
- Master the art of listening to students.
- Learn how to ask good questions.

Session Three: Meeting and Exceeding Student Expectations

- Develop familiarity with the "how-to's" of performing for students and co-workers.
- Review ways of learning as a tool to deliver positive communication.
- Know when to make promises to students and co-workers.
- Know how to handle problem situations.
- Avoid the danger of "too much knowledge."
- Understand the training and orientation needs of staff.
- Identify the "whys" of practicing the Connections principles.
- Work successfully with "problem" or "complaining" students and co-workers.
- Learn techniques for switching an upset student into a satisfied student.
- Put Connections to work for you.

Connections at a Glance

The tables on pages 22-24 provide a quick glance reference, by session, as follows:

Column 1	Number and title of sections in Participant Book
Column 2	Participant Book page numbers
Column 3	Leader's Guide page numbers
Column 4	Video section number
Column 5	Approximate video running time
Column 6	Corresponding exercise number and title
Column 7	Participant Book page number for exercises and activities

Connections Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do

Participant Book Section	Participant Book Page(s)	Leader's Guide Pages	Video Section No.	Video Running Time	Exercise No. and Title	Participant Book Page
1. Making First Impressions Lasting Impressions	1-3	29-40	1	1 min. 36 sec.	1. Making First Impressions Lasting Impressions	4
2. Welcome to Connections	5-8	41-46	2	3 min. 12 sec.	2. Making Connections With a Caring Attitude	9
3. Why Do People Do What They Do?	11-18	47-58	3	4 min. 41 sec.	3. Understanding Why People Do What They Do	19
					Personal Goal Statement	21
4. Feeling Good About Yourself	23-27	59-65	4	2 min. 23 sec.	4. Feeling Good About Yourself	28
		66-70	5	2 min. 52 sec.	5. Personalizing Service	29
5. Treating People With Respect	31-34	71-76	6	1 min. 23 sec.	6. Treating People With Respect	35
6. The Quality of Your Work	37-41	77-82	7	53 sec.	7. Consistent Impressions	42
		82-84			8. The Importance of Quality Service	43
7. Doing More Than the Minimum	45-48	85-92	8	8 min. 47 sec.	9. Using Positive Communication Proactively	49
		92-93			10. Identifying Common Communication Barriers	50
		94-95			11. Turning Negative Communication Into Positive Communication	52
		97	9	1 min. 1 sec.	Review Questionnaire One: Session One, Sections 1-7	53
		98-100			Becoming a Partner in Change	55
				Total 26 min. 48 sec.		

Connections Session Two: Using the Language of Positive Communication

Participant Book Section	Participant Book Page(s)	Leader's Guide Pages	Video Section No.	Video Running Time	Exercise No. and Title	Participant Book Page
1. What Is Positive Communication?	57-67	101-115	1	6 min. 16 sec.	Table of Communication Styles	68
		116-120			12. Identifying Positive and Negative Communication	69
2. How's Your Image?	71-75	121-126	2	3 min. 13 sec.	13. Building a Positive Mindset	76
			3	2 min. 47 sec.	14. Moving From Negative to Positive Interaction	77
3. What Does the Student Need?	79-86	131-141	4	1 min. 16 sec. 3 min. 5 sec.	15. Tips for Positive Telephone Techniques	87
		142-144	5	2 min. 13 sec.	16. Using Voice Messaging and E-mail Effectively	89
		145-148	6	3 min. 40 sec.	17. Really Listening Makes All the Difference	91
		149			Rules for Role Play	93
		150-151			Optional Exercise: Telephone Role Play	94
		152-153			Optional Exercise: Active Listening	96
		154-156	7	35 sec.	Review Questionnaire Two: Session Two, Sections 1-3	99
			Total	23 min. 5 sec.		

Connections Session Three: Meeting and Exceeding Student Expectations						
Participant Book Section	**Participant Book Page(s)**	**Leader's Guide Pages**	**Video Section No.**	**Video Running Time**	**Exercise No. and Title**	**Participant Book Page**
1. Our Campuswide Commitment	101-103	161-166	1	4 min.	18. Understanding the Nature of Our Promises	104
2. Our Other "Customers"	107-112	167-176	2	4 min. 44 sec.	19. Putting Training and Orientation to Work	113
					20. Building on Training and Orientation	114
3. Handling Complaints	115-121	177-190	3	1 min. 51 sec. 1 min. 59 sec.	21. Applying Quality Service Techniques	122
					22. Responding Positively to Negative Communication	123
					23. Moving From Complaints to Resolution	124
4. And in Conclusion ...	125-128	191-202	4	3 min. 14 sec.	24. Using Tact and Staying Calm	129
			5	1 min. 30 sec.	Group Session Critique Form	131
					Follow-up Review	133
			Total	17 min. 3 sec.		

Follow-up Session

We recommend that the initial Connections sessions be followed up 30 to 60 days after completion of the third session. The focus of the Follow-up Session should be the materials discussed in Session One, Section 4; Session Two, Section 1; and Session Three, Section 3 of the Connections Participant Book, plus the review questions in the Participant Book. (See pages 205-208 of the Leader's Guide.)

We also recommend that campuses design their own orientation program so that all employees hired after the initial Connections presentation can benefit. The follow-up program must be adapted to the particular needs of your school. You'll find that Connections makes an excellent introductory and orientation tool for all new employees.

What's Next?

Connections in the first is a series of quality service programs from Noel-Levitz. It focuses on the attitudes, skills, and behavior of individual staff, reinforcing that staff have the power to choose to feel good about themselves and their work. Connections focuses on individual empowerment: take the situation you're in right now and make it better; you have the power to do that; you can start immediately. Through Connections, the overall level of campus service improves by improving the attitude and behaviors of individual staff.

A companion Noel-Levitz program, Advanced Connections, is designed to meet the needs of campuses that use Connections and want a follow-up program. Advanced Connections focuses on teamwork and relationships. The theme of Advanced Connections is building a service culture—the next step in a comprehensive, long-term approach to achieving consistent customer service throughout the organization.

Quality service culture

A quality service culture depends on two equally important components: staff, faculty, and administrators with the skills and individual commitment to provide the best service possible, *and* campus systems, policies, and procedures that support these efforts.

Almost every topic in Connections that focuses on the individual has a parallel topic in Advanced Connections that focuses on staff, faculty, and administrators working together. For example, in Connections the section on telephone skills focuses on *individual* phone skills. Advanced Connections focuses on the *relationship* side of phone calls: effectively taking messages, screening calls for others, reducing needless transfers among offices, handling voice mail messages, etc.

Whereas Connections emphasizes handling difficult situations, the emphasis in Advanced Connections is on problem prevention and shared problem solving. Advanced Connections also strongly emphasizes the importance of educating internal and external customers to be intelligent consumers of education products and services.

Advanced Connections reinforces the importance of individual skills, but the program takes the approach that the best long-term approach is to work together to put in place a system that works for everyone—customers and staff. Advanced Connections provides participants with skills and strategies for working together with diverse departments and diverse teams of people.

In summary, a quality service culture on campus depends on two equally important components: staff, faculty, and administrators with the skills and individual commitment to provide the best service possible, *and* campus systems, policies, and procedures that support these efforts. Together, Connections and Advanced Connections meet the needs of building a quality service culture on campus.

Connections and Advanced Connections at a Glance

	Connections	Advanced Connections
1. Audience	Primarily front-line staff. Used sometimes with administrators and faculty.	Designed to be appropriate for use with all campus personnel, including faculty and administration.
2. Program purpose	Promotes quality service through individual excellence.	Builds a service culture campuswide through staff, faculty, and administrators working together.
3. Program focus	Primary focus on the individual. Some focus on relationships.	Primary focus on relationships. Some focus on the individual.
4. Individual skills	Primary emphasis on personal skills, attitude, and motivation.	Review of key individual skills. Focus on team skills and strategies.
5. Behavioral change goals	Focus on individual change.	Focus on individual change *and* institutional change.
Selected Program Topics		
6. Handling difficult situations	Emphasis on handling angry customers and difficult situations for which there are solutions.	Emphasis on handling more complex problems. Emphasis on identifying and preventing system problems. Emphasis on shared problem solving through customer education.
7. Communication skills	Focus on power of positive communication on the telephone, in voice mail, and in e-mail.	"Relationship" communication skills; checking for satisfaction, reading, and responding to customer cues, etc.
8. Telephone skills	Individual phone skills. Personal attitude and attentiveness on the phone. Voice messaging.	"Relationship" phone skills: handling transfers, taking messages, screening calls, reducing needless transfers, using voice mail effectively, etc.
9. Continuous learning	Professional growth through knowledge of students and the institution.	Professional growth through knowledge of students, internal and external customers, and the institution.

Optional Exercises

Optional exercises may be included in your sessions or reserved for follow-up sessions. There are several suggested in the Leader's Guide. The "Telephone Role Play" and "Active Listening Role Play" in Session Two and "Handling Complaints" in Session Three are major role plays that provide good material for an extended session or a meaningful follow-up session. Although the system calls for one follow-up session, it is recommended that activities described as optional exercises become part of regularly scheduled staff meetings.

Rules for Role Play are included on Leader's Guide page 149.

Implementation Suggestions

Audience Size

8-12 participants—ideal for new Group Leaders

12-15 participants—the optimum size

16-25 participants—fine, but requires experienced Group Leaders

Implementation: Three Sessions

The above audience sizes are for three separate sessions. Experience has shown that the structured repetition and dialogue among participants works most effectively in three sessions.

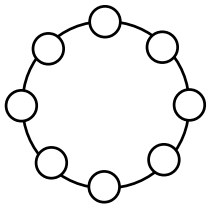
Alternative Implementation: One Session

From time to time, particularly in sessions where new employees are trained, either the size of the group or time restraints may require conducting all three Connections sessions in a single, running session. Groups typically need at least five hours for a single combined session. Remember three separate sessions are recommended because the spaced repetition allows the participants to better internalize the learning.

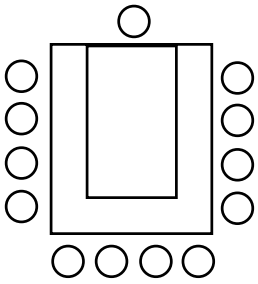
If you do conduct Connections in a one-day session, it is a good idea to distribute the Participant Books seven to ten days in advance and request that staff read the book as a pre-class assignment. You may want to recommend they also complete the Review Questionnaires on pages 53 and 99.

Seating Suggestions

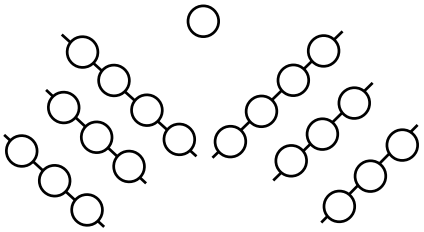
Small audience of
8-12 participants



Medium size audience of
12-15 participants



Larger size audience of
16-25 participants



In all of the sessions, attempt to create a fun atmosphere. Decorate the meeting room with posters, if available. For Session Two, Session Three, and the Follow-up Session, hang "Welcome Back" posters which you and your group have made.

Session One: Understanding Why People Do What They Do

Objectives:

The objectives of Session One are to:

- Welcome participants to Session One of Connections and kick off the program.
- Introduce the Connections Participant Book—*Practice for Excellence, Path to Success*—and distribute copies to participants.
- Identify why people feel the way they do about any business they patronize.
- Use videotaped dramatizations to illustrate the significance of quality service.
- Develop an understanding of how attitudes are transmitted to others.
- Conduct an inventory of participants' attitudes toward quality service.
- Develop familiarity with the concepts of positive and negative communication in relationships with students.
- Examine our daily need for positive communication.
- Encourage active and frequent participation of all participants for maximum learning benefits.
- Give assignments for the next meeting.

Time of the Session:

Session One is designed to last 2 to 2 1/2 hours, and may be extended by the Group Leader.