

**Teamwork & Appreciation:  
Building Support and Achieving Strategic Goals through Appreciative  
Inquiry**

**Team Presentation by Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC)  
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**1. Introduction**

Harrisburg Area Community College has successfully employed Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Dialogue techniques to develop, support and achieve its strategic planning goals. Whether within an individual campus or department, within the confines of a specific project or initiative, or in the context of a major, multi-year college-wide goal, AI has proven to be an adaptable, user-friendly and energizing tool that rarely fails to draw diverse constituents to positive consensus and shared vision.

Established in 1964 as Pennsylvania's first (of 14) community college, Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) today serves 18,000 degree-seeking students and 30,000 non-credit students across a ten-county service area. With regional campuses at Harrisburg, Lebanon, Lancaster, Gettysburg and York, it has branded itself as "HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College." This broad geographic reach (the other 13 community colleges are concentrated on the east and west sides of the Keystone State) and the struggle to remain "one college" have been at the heart of strategic planning concerns, aims and college-wide conversations.

**2. First Experiences with AI at Gettysburg Campus**

At the beginning of 2002, the staff of HACC Gettysburg Campus was facing a building expansion that would double its size. The campus had grown in thirteen years from 127 students in a small center located in the basement of a public school building to a comprehensive branch campus with an enrollment of 842 students. As the expansion loomed, Dean Jennifer Weaver contacted AI consultant Susan Star Paddock to facilitate a strategic planning process focusing on how to maintain their small campus feeling of a community with expanded facilities and staff, and a rapidly growing student enrollment. To ensure these intentions, Gettysburg Campus wanted to know what it was doing to cause its rapid success, so that it could be replicated. A campus committee decided on an AI session to help people discover the root cause of success of the Gettysburg Campus.

Approximately 30 students, staff, and faculty met together for a half a day of Discovery and Dreaming. Analyzing the data from appreciative interviews, the group reached broad

agreement that the single most compelling reason for the campus' rapid growth was its student focus. The group unanimously saw that a positive future depended on whether they could maintain that student focus. They felt they needed to (1) build on the student focus; (2) create their own campus identity; (3) build on their sense of an innovative, encouraging, and friendly community; and (4) appreciate the positive and hardworking staff and faculty.

This Discovery session ended with AI Dreaming about what these four life-giving forces would look like if they were lived out on campus every day.

The energy was high after the meeting but, when the building expansion was completed in the fall, with its new stresses, Weaver felt the atmosphere of appreciation on the campus needed another boost. She held several follow-up meetings with different groups to generate a list of "100 things that are excellent at our campus." Each time the groups focused on appreciation, morale and productivity increased.

In spring of 2003, forty-three staff, faculty, and students participated in a one-day follow-up to the first meeting. The inquiry, Enhancing Our Student-Focused Learning Community, centered on the four identified themes of student focus, campus identity, sense of community, and positive outlook. This group went deeper into Discovery and Dreaming about the elements of success and leveraged that knowledge into appreciative Designing. The group then began a continuing process of Design to ensure that all of the campus institutional structures supported the vision of a student-centered appreciative campus.

In fall of 2003, a faculty in-service at the Gettysburg Campus offered another introduction to the emerging appreciative philosophy. The introduction began with one-on-one appreciative interviews on how faculty could create a student-focused learning community at the Gettysburg Campus. Following appreciative interviews, faculty members shared some of their best stories and then moved into suggested ways of helping students develop a can-do spirit. These ideas were collected, and the cross-fertilization of ideas proved to be valuable to the faculty. Participant evaluations were consistently positive and had requests for AI to be used more widely.

### **3. A Good Idea Expands College-wide**

In June 2003, AI Facilitator Paddock was approached by HACC President Edna Baehre, Gettysburg Dean Jennifer Weaver and presidential assistant David Morrison about expanding HACC's AI use college-wide. It was agreed that the first step would be in the context of a day-long retreat of the President's Cabinet (15 persons including vice presidents, executive staff and the deans of the Regional Campuses).

HACC was in the midst of its second multi-year strategic plan, was approaching its 40th anniversary and was feeling the strains of unrelenting growth. Changes in the make-up of the Cabinet along with some recent reorganizations added to the sense of team uncertainty in a changing environment. The questions and story-telling that day, along

with a novel exercise in which each participant wrote one appreciative statement on a shirt cardboard on the back of every colleague, resulted in enhanced relationships and a new team spirit that has grown stronger and more effective ever since. In closing discussions, the cabinet members expressed their new-found sense of collaborative and reciprocal support and a deepened appreciation of what each individual brought to the group. In fact, it was on that day that the notion of “teamwork” as a HACC core value was unmistakably discovered and embraced by the College leaders, and further, that teamwork was as important “at every level” as it was at the top.

HACC’s leaders brought Paddock back in the summer of 2004 to facilitate a series of sessions at all four HACC campuses (the York campus center did not yet exist). Building on the discovered theme that had emerged a year earlier at the Cabinet Retreat, the sessions were entitled “A Celebration of HACC Teamwork.” President Baehre used the occasions to announce a number of appointments and promotions, to recognize staff achievements and to applaud the myriad employee teams who had helped to make the unfolding anniversary year such a milestone.

Beginning symbolically at the Gettysburg Campus, all employees were invited to attend the two-hour afternoon sessions in which Paddock invited them to share and develop stories about their teamwork experiences “within the office,” “within the campus,” “within the College” and “beyond the College.” Rich lists of “what we are doing already” quickly filled the walls, citing well-known instances of teamwork (and “partnerships,” a term freely substituted) as well as hidden – but equally remarkable – stories.

At each campus, dozens of participants – faculty, administrators and classified (support) staff – quickly discovered how central the notion of teamwork was to their individual success, their professional fulfillment and, best of all, their personal connection and relevance to HACC’s most celebrated advancements and community contributions.

In a second round of questions, Paddock invited the participants to build on these examples and generate lists of “what we can do” at the office, campus, college and community levels. A wealth of proposals (142 in all!) emerged, some to be advanced by their proposers, and others to be taken up as College initiatives. Lastly, participants were asked, “What personal steps are we considering,” provoking many dozens of additional ideas, goals and personal challenges. Purposely worded not to demand legal obligation, the question freed participants of the fear or failure.

The high spirits that lingered from these mid-summer sessions ushered in the new school year, beginning with a special 40th Anniversary Convocation that included a procession of visiting college presidents and other dignitaries as well as inspiring speeches by Harrisburg’s mayor (an alumnus) and HACC’s venerable co-founder, whose messages resonated well with the themes of teamwork and celebration.

Wishing to sustain the enthusiasm and collegial spirits, President Baehre scheduled another round of “teamwork celebrations” at the four campuses in April 2005. The focus

of these sessions, in addition to spotlighting more instances of outstanding accomplishment and teamwork, was to strengthen the links between the previously generated themes and ideas and the next emerging multi-year College Strategic Plan.

Within the draft 2005-2008 Strategic Plan's five major goals, two were ongoing, updated goals – (1) student success; and (2) teaching excellence; while three were new goals – (3) communication at all levels; (4) collegiality and inclusiveness and (5) partnerships at all levels. The three new goals exhibited unmistakable correlation to the themes that had emerged during the previous year's gatherings and discussions. While the first two goals embraced the College's customers (students) and its product (education), the three new goals embraced its core characteristics, as identified through the Appreciative Inquiry process. This reflected a clear recognition that "what we do" is no more important than "how we do it." We can only achieve pinnacles of success by building on our existing strengths, past successes and core characteristics.

Each major goal contained about a half dozen sub-goals, and not surprisingly these specific objectives were heavy in the arena of human resources: in short, providing the environment, atmosphere, tools, structure and encouragement that would enable a competent workforce to achieve pinnacles of success.

#### **4. The Emphasis on Human Resources in HACC's Strategic Plan**

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an excellent process to learn what is important to the faculty and staff at your College. As was mentioned earlier, hearing stories from faculty and staff from all our campuses on what works for them or what creates positive feelings in our faculty and staff helps to create goals that will foster a more collegial and inclusive college community and in turn enhance the quality of the work and learning environment. With this information, we were able to set strategic sub-goals that dealt with providing ongoing training for faculty and staff on effective interpersonal communication to ensure responsiveness on all levels, and training to keep our faculty and staff at the forefront of knowledge and competence in their fields, which so many of their AI stories showed how important it was to them to excel in their areas.

Their stories also told us that faculty and staff feel it is important to recruit and retain quality employees and that we meet our staffing needs by refining our personnel planning. Their stories also showed that we need to continue to look at our overall College organizational structure so that it provides better communication, teamwork, and collegiality between departments and campuses.

These themes and ideas presented in our AI teamwork sessions established three of the five major goals which strongly relate to personnel effectiveness and satisfaction through communication, collegiality, and partnerships and/or teamwork.

As the leader of HACC's Human Resource Office, and with major emphasis on Human Resources in our strategic plan, I am an IP goal coordinator for several sub-goals in our strategic plan. These sub-goals have helped Human Resources set their unit objectives to

help the College reach their strategic goals for 2005 - 2008. As the IP Coordinator, I must also report bi-annually what others throughout the College are doing to meet these sub-goals. With this process in place, we can keep the momentum going to reach our goals and to memorialize what all has occurred.

## **5. HACC's CORE Awards Program**

One of the projects that AI has helped to initiate is the CORE Awards Program at HACC. After the AI teamwork sessions, it was evident that recognition was important to our faculty and staff. HR formed a committee consisting of classified staff, administrators, and faculty from different campuses to look at ways that we could reward and recognize our employees

“When people aren't having fun, when they're not recognized for outstanding performance, when no one says thanks, they become disengaged and feel unimportant. Recognition, I believe, is more important than salaries, benefits, and bonuses, since most large companies pay competitively. It is corporate America's most underused motivation tool.” said Richard Kovacevich, Chairman and CEO, of Wells Fargo.

The committee was charged to create a simple system that will provide strategic recognition solutions that are consistent throughout the College, aligned with our vision, values, culture, and strategic goals, and engage employees and managers through on-going communication by effectively praising through meaningful award presentations.

One of the ways the committee identified to achieve this purpose is to deal with a third party vendor that uses an integrated approach to recognition. By using AI and working with our vendor, we identified our objectives and success factors, developed program criteria, developed a communication system that explains College goals and expected behaviors to faculty and staff, and train managers how to align recognition with organizational goals, understand the power of recognition and how to do it right.

This integrated system allows for simple management by providing fast, secure way to nominate, approve and reward faculty and staff accomplishments. The system uses a nomination wizard which is an online tool to facilitate consistency and fairness. It allows easy, no-cost e-cards to praise faculty and staff efforts and make it easy to select and fulfill gift awards.

The committee decided to have three categories of recognition in this integrated system:

1. Thank You Cards which we call “Applause Awards”
2. \$50 Gift Awards which we call “Standing Ovation Awards”
3. \$500 Check Award which we call the “Presidents Award”

Using AI core themes, successes, and new ideas in conjunction with our mission, vision, and strategic plan, the committee created HACC's CORE Values and Model Behaviors:

### **C – Customer Service, Communication**

Listens carefully and respectfully to the needs of students, colleagues, and others from within and outside the College community and takes prompt appropriate action that exceeds expectations

Anticipates needs and responds with complete, accurate, and relevant solutions

Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the college, its programs, and services to meet current or anticipated needs or inquiries of our students and customers

Handles difficult situations in a personable and professional manner that builds trust and confidence

Contributes to an environment of open communication by asking open-ended questions to ensure understanding and to provide clear and concise information

### **O – Ownership**

Takes initiative and ownership often beyond normal responsibilities to ensure results and is open to new ideas, perspectives, and approaches

Takes responsibility for the safety and well-being of self and others

Raises team effectiveness through individual commitment and performance

Embraces change and applies new ideas, methods, and technologies to improve operating efficiency and financial viability

Seeks a variety of learning opportunities to broaden skills and perspective

### **R – Respect, Recognition, Responsiveness**

Sees an opportunity, takes action and does what it takes to get the job done with limited direction

Values diversity, seeks others' ideas, develops camaraderie, and takes decisive action to maximize results

Motivates, mentors, and enables others to develop their skills and enhance their performance.

Recognizes opportunities, sets a vision, aligns resources and inspires others to achieve results

Assumes extra responsibilities beyond defined position expectations to bring success to the project or job.

### **E – Excellence**

Provides consistent, reliable, and sustainable efforts and/or solutions

Delivers superior work that is recognized by students, colleagues, and customers

Establishes new standards of excellence, takes responsibility to achieve results, and motivates others to pursue excellence

Demonstrates a passion for excellence and commitment to continuous improvement

Enhances excellence in teaching or other professional responsibilities

We created flyers and posters (see Appendix A) announcing the program which is designed to celebrate our faculty and staff who apply the HACC CORE values in their performance.

Our employees just need to go to the web site at <http://recognition.octanner.com/nomination/hacc/default.jsp> and follow the directions online on how to send an e-card thanking them for applying the HACC CORE values in their performance or how to nominate an employee to receive a \$50 gift of their choosing because they did an exceptional job. Our web page explains what the CORE Award Program is (see Appendix B).

This new project has been quite successful with hundreds of faculty and staff participating. The integrated system allows for reports to be run seeing who are getting awards and what managers are using this reward and recognition system.

To keep the momentum of this project going, one of the activities at the Teamwork and Appreciation Session III was to implement the CORE Awards process in a creative and inclusive manner. As a co-facilitator of this group, we used appreciative dialogue to discover common ground in appreciation and recognition. By sharing our success stories regarding moments of appreciation and recognition at HACC, we developed core themes, successes and new ideas which lead to a provocative statement of:

We propose Harrisburg Area Community College is nationally known for its all encompassing recognition programs that include staff as well as students. The institutional culture of service to others helps us to inspire one another to ever greater degrees of mutual appreciation and respect.

We propose to celebrate and recognize outstanding acts of service and accomplishment. Special programs are in place fostering HACC's service-oriented culture: Core Awards Program, Student Appreciation Program, celebration of achievements both personal and team, college-wide Core Awards Corner in the News Notes, the annual college-wide social event, outstanding faculty awards, and the President's Monthly Kudos and Appreciation letters. Benefits go beyond the boundaries of the College into our communities promoting lifelong attitudes and initiatives of service and appreciation.

The team that worked on this statement will meet with the original committee on rewards and recognition to implement this statement.

## **6. Teamwork III – Deepening AI's Roots Throughout HACC Territory**

Always on the lookout for ways to sink AI's roots deeper while reinforcing the spreading mantra of teamwork, Dr. Baehre returned from a national conference in early 2006 with an idea that Dr. Cynthia Heelan, a retired community college president now consulting and facilitating using AI, might help HACC to take itself to the next level. Baehre,

Morrison, Weaver and Tulli worked with Dr. Heelan to shape HACC's biggest round of AI yet, titled "Teamwork and Appreciation."

In late August 2006, Heelan spent a full week at HACC that included a Sunday evening dinner with the Cabinet, half-day sessions at all four campuses and a final full-day Friday session with the Cabinet and the College Strategic Planning Committee.

It was agreed that this round of events would focus on Goal 4 of the College Strategic Plan, "Build a more collegial and inclusive College community and enhance the quality of the working and learning environment." The recent academic year had ended on some sour notes, with professional passions morphing into regrettable actions, and Baehre determined that a week of AI, around the theme of "Collegiality and Inclusiveness," might purge some of the poison and reinvigorate the dominant force of teamwork and collaborative spirit.

Heelan structured each session in five units exploring "civility, teamwork, collaboration and a work and learning environment that welcomes the whole person." First, participants were invited to identify "the CORE of our success." Long lists at each campus mentioned "positive attitude," "compromise," "shared vision," "mutual support," "encouragement," "respect," and, quite frequently, "communication" and "teamwork."

Second, the groups identified the "themes of our SUCCESS," strengthening and grouping the dominant themes from the earlier list. The third step, "Building on our successes: NEW IDEAS," invited the groups to project the successes into new areas. These ideas included "getting together across division and campus lines," "student focus," "compassionate dialog," "one HACC voice," "lead from any chair," "focus on the positive," and "dare to change."

The fourth step, "Designing new initiatives: PROVOCATIVE PROPOSITIONS," asked the participants, in table groupings of eight, to take key ingredients from the first three lists and design "provocative propositions" that would "stretch the College." There were 43 such statements, one of which stated: "At HACC we recognize individuality and uniqueness: of students, of colleagues and of our campuses." Our college-wide personality is to recognize each and every person through open exchange, mutual respect, innovative teaching, approachable leadership, and student-focused counseling. Our initiatives include regular opportunities. To dialogue, attend town meetings, and network.

At the Friday wrap-up session on September 1, 2006, about 30 members of the Cabinet and the College Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the combined results of the week's sessions (a 37-page document containing hundreds of "successes" and "ideas" as well as all 43 "provocative propositions." The goal was to distill the essence of the week's work into a clear prescription of guiding priorities that represented College-wide thinking and input.

By the end of the day, two overarching Provocative Propositions had been crafted, each with a number of supporting initiatives (nine in all) that advanced the leading themes and ideas of the week's work. The initiatives were assigned to Cabinet-level team leaders for implementation over the coming school year. Subsequent to Heelan's visit, the propositions and initiatives were issued to the College Community in the form of a summary report titled "One College, Many Voices," reflecting the dual major themes of the week's work and consensus.

The first proposition, "Appreciating One Another" stated: "At HACC, we celebrate community by recognizing the individuality and uniqueness of our students, faculty and staff, programs, and campuses. Our college-wide ethos is to encourage individuals through open dialogue, sincere and unsolicited support, and personal responsibility. We encourage "leadership from every chair". We strengthen our relationships through collegial gatherings, both in small groups and college-wide. We inspire one another by sharing HACC success stories. We reward hard work, teamwork and risk-taking through informal as well as formal reward programs."

The second proposition, "Listening to many voices, seeking one" stated: "HACC is characterized as a Community College which respects and celebrates the uniqueness of the communities and people in Central Pennsylvania; as represented in its students, staff, faculty, campuses and programs. We build communication bridges that allow diverse thinking to emerge and evolve into a common voice. All individuals make a commitment to maintain an open mind and heart to individuals, programs, and campuses. We see it when we believe it."

The propositions and the supporting initiatives that surrounded them had successfully captured all of the high-priority concerns and aspirations expressed by the College community during the course of the week. In fact the title, "One College, Many Voices," said it all. The outcome included not only the achieving of this consensus vision of the institution and its people, but also the enumerated initiatives that would make the vision a reality. In an inclusive, democratic fashion, hundreds of individuals had joined to chart a new destiny.

## **7. Teamwork IV – Recent Successes; Widespread Activity**

President Baehre had already determined that Heelan should return at the start of the spring semester for another week of "Teamwork and Appreciation." Again, the objective was to build on progress to date. There were two primary goals: to engage the College in moving the "One College, Many Voices" initiatives forward (and deflect any notion that they had been a purely academic exercise); and to broaden the College's ability to utilize – and benefit from – Appreciative Inquiry. In addition, the week's itinerary was designed to encourage and ensure the people congregated at all campuses ("not just Harrisburg," a gripe-turned-positive-initiative that had emerged in Heelan's previous tour.)

Monday, January 29 was devoted to AI facilitator training for the Cabinet and any interested volunteers. Nearly 50 attended. They learned the basics of AI facilitation while simultaneously planning to immediately turn around and facilitate (in small groups) seven sessions over the next four days at all four regional campuses (now including York). By the end of Monday's session, each table-sized team had drafted a 'conversation guide' (from Heelan's template) that included AI questions and exercises designed to elicit provocative propositions regarding seven of the pending nine initiatives (the two remaining initiatives, "expanding AI" and "convening town meetings" were inherent in the week's overall agenda.)

The College community had been invited to sign up for any or all of the seven sessions. A total of more than 300 registrations resulted, not counting a large number who regretted but asked to join an effort later. In groups ranging from 12 to 50 attendees, these three-hour sessions achieved results that pleased and energized everyone. The seven "projects" that had been identified as College priorities six months earlier were transformed into functioning enterprises, either free-standing (as in the case of a new HACC Leadership Institute to encourage "leadership from any chair" etc. and the plan to "create a DVD celebrating HACC.") or as targeted addenda to existing efforts (such as the CORE Awards program, and a recently begun effort to enhance the College's electronic communications). The efforts were seen as practical, positive and productive of tangible results or plans with full stakeholder involvement.

The week had produced many tangible outcomes. AI was successfully transplanted and growing on HACC soil, with in-house facilitators and a track record of AI accomplishments. The College Strategic Plan had been bolstered and invigorated by the seven newly-designed team efforts. HACC faculty and staff had worked across campus and organizational barriers in an environment of enhanced teamwork, communication and collegiality. Everything seemed to tie together and make sense!

## **8. Conclusions; Looking Ahead**

In February 2007, the seven project teams, under the chairmanship of their respective AI facilitator(s), were at work shaping reports that highlighted their provocative propositions. These will be shared with the College community in March following a meeting of the facilitators and the College Strategic Planning Committee to ensure that each project is properly positioned within the framework of existing College strategic activity. Town Meetings are planned for April for providing status reports and receiving feedback from all campuses. These efforts will continue until the projects -- and the 2005-2008 College Strategic Plan -- are successfully accomplished.

The latest Teamwork and Appreciation week yielded an additional conclusion: that AI as a technique can be quickly, simply and effectively adapted to address any problem, shape any project or resolve any question. For example, the College Equal Opportunity Committee had been wrestling for months with the self-assigned task of drafting a College Diversity Statement. At its meeting on March 12, the Committee will employ AI to draft the statement in the form of a Provocative Proposition.

As of February 2007, the College is enjoying a strengthening of its core values of teamwork, communication, diversity and collegiality. Its Strategic Plan is achieving visible alignment with these core values and with the group-generated priorities of the recent Teamwork sessions. And Appreciative Inquiry is becoming a major guiding force for inclusive goal-setting, problem-solving and decision-making.

**About the presenters:**

*Meredith Tulli* is the Executive Director of Human Resources at HACC since August of 1999. Ms. Tulli is responsible for the policies and procedures relating to all phases of human resources management for all campuses at HACC. Ms. Tulli has an A.S. from HACC, a BS in Business and Economics from Wilson College, and MPA from Penn State. Ms. Tulli is a Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) and is active in the local and national chapters of College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) and the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM).

*Jennifer Weaver*, campus dean, has served as the CEO at the Gettysburg campus since its inception in 1990. In this capacity, she directs the overall programs and services at the regional campus including budget development, operations and planning, student support and community partnerships. She serves as a member of the President's Cabinet.

*David J. Morrison* has served as Assistant to the President at Harrisburg Area Community College since July 2002. In this capacity, he has responsibility for policy and planning (serving as chair of the College-wide Strategic Planning Committee), for organizing retreats of the Board of Trustees and the President's Cabinet, and for organizing certain College-wide events and celebrations. The use of AI in all of these activities has been well received.

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# APPENDIX A

# How do you say Thank you?



Every day, there are HACC employees who go above-and-beyond the requirements of their jobs. They make the extra effort to help students, their fellow employees and visitors to the campus.

Now, we have a special way to say thank you to all of those HACC team members – both faculty and staff – who make that extra effort.

The HACC Core Awards Program is a new way to recognize individuals who have gone the extra mile. You can recognize someone who reports to you or you can recognize a co-worker.

Or, if you're a student or visitor to our campus, you can use one of the cards attached below to let us know about the special treatment you received.



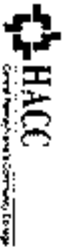
There are three levels of recognition and the top two include cash awards. All three recognize those special people who help make HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College, a very special place.

Introducing the  
**CORE Awards Program**  
at HACC.



# HACC

Central Pennsylvania's Community College



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VIEW AWARD LEVELS SEND THANK YOU E-CARD START A NOMINATION ORDER AN AWARD

Program Overview



**CORE AWARDS PROGRAM**

The success we enjoy at HACC reflects our commitment to excellence and the relationships we build with our students and with one another. Naturally, those Faculty & Staff who strengthen our reputation for service and excellence deserve recognition. We are proud to offer HACC's Core Awards Program, a recognition opportunity designed to celebrate our people who apply the HACC values in their performance. We are proud to honor Faculty & Staff who go above and beyond their expected responsibilities to achieve outstanding results.

**CORE VALUES**

- CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMUNICATION
- OWNERSHIP
- RESPECT, RECOGNITION, RESPONSIVENESS
- EXCELLENCE

Click on one of the values to view related entries

