

# IDEAS IN ACTION: A Case Study

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## “Q.U.E.S.T. for Excellence” at Walter Reed Army Medical Center October 2008

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### Background

For nearly a century, Walter Reed Army Medical Center has enjoyed a reputation as a premiere United States Army Medical Treatment Facility. While this history is impressive, the wars in the Middle East have ushered in an era of intense scrutiny surrounding care for wounded soldiers, so reputation alone is not enough to sustain patient loyalty or to achieve the mandated 95% patient satisfaction target.

In order to create a customer-centric culture, there must be a standard of excellence that everyone strives to achieve. Because Walter Reed’s reputation is dependent on patient perceptions as well as the quality of care, understanding the needs and expectations of the patient is crucial to the staff’s ability to provide world-class service. To meet this objective, the XIO team facilitated the development of a staff recognition program, in addition to other communications-related deliverables, in support of Walter Reed’s mission, goals and core values.

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### XIO Approach

After doubts about the quality of care at Walter Reed were publicly raised in a *Washington Post* series in February 2007, the leadership and staff were understandably concerned and worked hard to lay a solid foundation for the future. In addition to a wide variety of facilities improvements, process changes and communications programs, the Command group knew that the exceptional care and service provided by members of the staff should not go unrewarded.

**Q.U.E.S.T. for Excellence** is a comprehensive recognition program, representing Quality, Understanding, Excellence, Safety, and Teamwork. These are the hallmarks of the environment, level of care and degree of service that are worthy of our nation’s military and their families. Each of the five qualities of Q.U.E.S.T. is paramount to hospital operations, let alone customer service excellence, and serves as a constant reminder that the policies and procedures referenced within Q.U.E.S.T. set the standard of care. The Q.U.E.S.T. program begins with a compliment being submitted about a Walter Reed staff member or team who demonstrates customer service excellence within one or more of the Q.U.E.S.T. qualities. The compliments are collected, tracked, managed, and are tallied each April and October for award identification.

There are seven possible Q.U.E.S.T. awards, based on the number of compliments received. An award is defined as a periodic provision of tokens of appreciation or symbols of recognition that are presented at public ceremonies in June and December to individuals and teams. The awards were designed as follows:

- ★ **Level 1: Torch of Excellence Award** - This award includes three possible levels of achievement. For either two, three-five, or six-eleven compliments earned, recipients receive a Bronze, Silver, or Gold Torch of Excellence pin, respectively (*shown at right*). Each Torch of Excellence winner also receives a certificate of achievement and ribbon to display their pins.
- ★ **Level 2A: Pinnacle of Excellence Award** - If twelve-fourteen compliments (the equivalent of two gold torch pins) are earned, that individual is given a Gold Pinnacle of Excellence pin, a certificate of achievement, and the option to attend one locally-funded advanced customer service training course.



- ★ **Level 2B: Q.U.E.S.T. Torch Lighters Award** - Awarded only in December to the top clinic/ward/section that best demonstrates Q.U.E.S.T. qualities, as determined by the number of compliments received comparatively. Includes a private team luncheon with the Command Team in the Regimental Room and a team certificate of achievement. Two runners-up are also recognized with certificates of achievement.
- ★ **Level 3: Q.U.E.S.T. for Excellence Coin** - Awarded to recipients of 15 or more compliments, the Q.U.E.S.T. for Excellence includes a framed photo with the Commander and Command Team. Copies are placed on the physical and virtual Walls of Q.U.E.S.T. Excellence.
- ★ **Level 4: The WALTER Award** - The WALTER Award is only awarded to one of three nominees each December, and is considered the “Oscar” of staff recognition. The award is a bust in the likeness of Dr. Walter Reed. Award includes special parking privileges in The WALTER Award Winner designated parking space, a framed photo with the Commander and Command Team (with copies placed on the physical and virtual Walls of Q.U.E.S.T. Excellence) and a unique certificate of achievement.



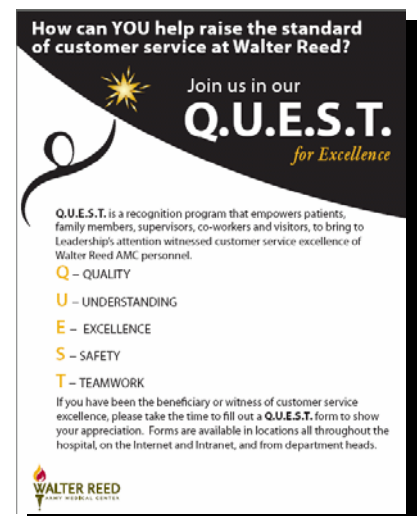

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## Execution

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Once the program was designed, the XIO team developed an extensive rollout plan to ensure the acceptance and success of Q.U.E.S.T. This plan included the announcement of the program at Staff Appreciation Day, an E-Announcement from the Commander, elevator posters (*shown at right*), table tents for the on-site dining facility, *Stripe* weekly newspaper articles, Q.U.E.S.T. forms and holders installed throughout the hospital, dedicated Intranet and Internet pages, a Wall of Q.U.E.S.T. Excellence build-out and a booth at Organization Day.

The inaugural Q.U.E.S.T. for Excellence ceremony took place on May 27, 2008 during which 38 awardees were recognized. This first ceremony set a precedent of recognizing personnel who demonstrated Q.U.E.S.T. qualities, generated excitement for the program, and built attendance for ceremonies moving forward.




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## Results

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The program was very well received by the staff of Walter Reed, as evidenced by collected metrics. The month prior to the introduction of the program, 46 compliments and 115 complaints were received. One month after the program introduction, compliments skyrocketed to 621 and complaints fell to 62 for the month. The marketing and communications consultants will continue to work with the Walter Reed leadership team to monitor program metrics relative to the baseline figures collected to-date.

To ensure the program's continued success, the XIO team will continue to publicize the program through available tools and work with the Walter Reed staff to integrate the Q.U.E.S.T. Program into employee orientation, the employee handbook and customer service training.

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**About XIO Strategies, Inc.:** *XIO Strategies, a Vienna Virginia-based woman-owned business, specializes in supply chain management and communications consulting services to government, military and commercial organizations. XIO works with organizations both large and small to effectively support technology deployment, conduct research and training, create marketing materials, and manage communications programs during periods of change. For more information, visit [www.xiostrategies.com](http://www.xiostrategies.com).*