

GROW YOUR PEOPLE THROUGH APPRECIATION

Nourishment takes many forms

By Patricia Katz



Appreciation is the fuel that grows people and organizations in value and worth. Recognition and celebration are more than just the icing on the cake. They are vital in strengthening relationships, sustaining organizations and maintaining the loyalty of employees, clients and volunteers.

WHY BOTHER?

Towers Watson (a major HR consultancy) recently found that the single-highest driver of engagement is whether or not workers feel their managers are genuinely interested in their well-being. If you're in a leadership role, encouraging others is a very strong way to express your interest.

Martin Shain, a researcher in workplace wellness, found that one of the most important indicators of happiness in the workplace is whether employees feel they have a friend at work. As a colleague in the workplace, sharing appreciation is a simple way to express your care and concern.

In terms of productivity and performance, researcher Michael Losada discovered that the highest performing teams demonstrate a six to one ratio of positive to negative comments. Sharing recognition with others is a significant way to increase the positivity and productivity in your team.

You may think there is already enough appreciation flowing through the workplace, but in a recent survey of 2,300 North American employees, 66 per cent said they would like to receive more appreciation on the job.

SIGNPOSTS TO NOTE

Expressing appreciation for others starts with knowing what to watch for. Encouragement is appropriate in situations where people are feeling weary, low, or uncertain. Watch for cues like these: someone seems discouraged or exhausted, a normally happy outgoing person appears to be withdrawn and down in the dumps, a colleague experiences a disappointment in their personal or work life, an individual is reluctant to take on a new responsibility or has experienced a failure in an attempt to master something new.

Downtimes are not the only cues to watch. Actively extending encouragement to others also springs from the watchfulness of an appreciative mindset. This means catching people doing things right. Watch for cues like these: a colleague meets a milestone or completes a task or project; someone goes out of their way for you or for the team; a person takes a risk, overcomes a fear, or makes a positive change; an individual expresses the best of your corporate values in their action with a

co-worker or a client. The more alert you are to cues like these, the more opportunities you will find to be a benevolent presence in the lives of others.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

If you haven't been especially active in encouraging others or don't feel very comfortable in that role, here are a few suggestions that will help you be more successful in your efforts. Tailor the recognition to the recipient. Ignore personal preferences at your peril. Introverts do not appreciate being centre stage and the focus of a public acknowledgement, extroverts thrive on it. Recognizing different people in the same way does not guarantee a positive result. If in doubt about how best to appreciate someone, watch for clues as to how an individual extends appreciation to others or ask the person directly what they would prefer.

Avoid milk-toast generalizations like: "good job, nice work, way to go." Describe in detail what you have noticed and why it mattered. Never assume that the individual or group you are recognizing is on the same wavelength and knows to what you are referring.

Recognize someone as soon as possible. Don't delay until later. Recognizing someone days or weeks after an event

reduces the sincerity and increases the suspicion with which it may be received. The individual may wonder why you are bringing that up at that time and what you may want next.

Strive for creativity and uniqueness. Don't settle for the same old, "It's your birthday - here's your cake." That wears thin after a while. Vary the way you recognize others from time to time and year to year. Repeating the same form of reward loses its impact over time. Even small changes bring a breath of fresh air.

Surprise people after the fact. Don't make every appreciation exchange a transactional experience. Suppose you need a few extra hours of help to bring a project in on time. Don't treat the situation like one where people need to be coerced to take part. (If you do this, then you'll get that!) Explain the need and enlist the help. Once, the task is done, surprise those who volunteered

with something they might value that would be appropriate in your organization - a food treat, a bit of time off, a small gift card. This approach avoids turning something by which people are naturally motivated (lending a helping hand) into an "If this - then that" bribery-like experience.

Tap into people's intrinsic motivation. Don't think you always have to provide a tangible external reward. Daniel Pink's research on motivation shows that people are naturally motivated by three things: Purpose, Mastery and Autonomy. Build on these elements. Connect what's being asked of people to the larger purpose and the difference that their work makes to others. Offer people opportunities to improve their skills and get better in areas that are important to them. As much as possible, let people decide how or in what order they will approach their re-

sponsibilities. Focusing on these elements is more about getting out of people's way than it is about showing them the way.

SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

Individuals are more conversant in some languages of appreciation than others.

Gary Chapman and Paul White describe this phenomenon in their book, *The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*. Each person has a primary language or two that they prefer, and languages that they just don't get.

Words of Affirmation is the first language. Some people prefer to hear in conversation or see in writing that their actions have been appreciated by others. For these folks, thank you cards, email messages and one-on-one conversations are all good ways to get the message across.

Tangible Gifts is language number two. Some individuals don't care so



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much about the words, and actually may dismiss them as irrelevant. Instead, they need to hold in their hands a token of your appreciation. It doesn't have to be something sizeable. A chocolate bar, a zany knick knack or a ticket to an event would all fall under this category.

Acts of Service is the third language. For people who value being appreciated in this way, they won't care that you brought them a memento, or that you told them they were doing good work. They will care that you rolled up your sleeves, pitched in and gave them a hand with a task on which they were falling behind, or that you thought to refill their coffee cup while you refilled your own.

Quality Time is language number four. This is even more valuable and tougher to come by in today's very hectic lives and workplaces. What this means is that you give the other person

your full and complete attention. You are present. You listen and watch and respond without being pulled off focus by people or distractions.


The final language of appreciation is **Physical Touch**. Needless to say, this option is a bit more sensitive and risky than the others. Still, there are times where touch is a commonly expressed and accepted form of celebration or appreciation. High fives and fist bumps are pretty safe expressions. If the recipient is someone you know well, and the two of you have a strong and solid relationship, an arm around the shoulder or a brief hug may be just the right encouragement in a tough situation. Approach this option with care.

The way people typically express themselves will often give you clues as to their preferred languages of appreciation. Pay close attention and use what you observe to guide your choices.

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Patricia Katz, MCE, CHRP, HoF, works with organizational leaders to reduce the impact of overload and overwhelm in their lives and workplaces. This best-selling author of five books shares her wisdom weekly with thousands of readers of her e-zine, *Pause*.



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