

The Power of Appreciation

How to Create an Organizational Culture of Appreciation that Impacts the Bottom Line

My grandfather lived in a nursing home during the last several years of his life. During one of my visits to see him, a nurse pulled me aside and told me what a great man my grandfather was. I appreciated that and asked her why she thought so. She said, “He is one of the only people here who consistently says thank you.”

That’s the power of *thank you*. They may be just two words in the English language, but those words mean so much to so many people. To this nurse, they meant everything.

Thank you. How often do your employees or co-workers hear those words? Many work extra hours, often for no additional money or benefit, and often without the benefit of hearing someone say thank you. Why do they do it? Because, like you, they want to make a difference in their jobs, and they want to

awards. Those have their place, but I’m talking about words. “Thank you, that was just what I was looking for.” “Thanks for the extra time that you put into this. I know you had to sacrifice some personal time.”

I heard from an employee of a Fortune 500 company who was recently nominated by her team for a formal award. She appreciates the nomination – particularly that the entire company received the text of her nomination. She said, “The public nature of it was quite validating. It doesn’t even matter if I receive the formal award. The initial nomination is enough. It makes me want to work harder and motivates me to want to invest myself more fully in what I do.” But she went on to say this: “Receiving acknowledgement from people throughout the year, in a less formal way, helps me to get through each day in a way that no amount of money could.”

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contribute. In fact, through conducting seminars, I have learned that one of the biggest fears that people seem to have in common is the fear of dying without making a difference. We all want to know that our lives count, and we need to feel like we matter to someone. That’s what makes appreciation so powerful.

In fact, appreciation is so powerful that it affects the bottom line. People who feel valued and appreciated are more likely to remain in their jobs, making appreciation a key factor in employee retention. Furthermore, sincere expressions of appreciation open the lines of communication and improve teamwork because people tend to be more open with co-workers who appreciate the job they do. This makes people more likely to express ideas and feedback, which also positively affects the bottom line.

As managers and co-workers we often need to share difficult feedback and constructive criticism. But how often do we share positive feedback – praise for a job well done? I’m not talking about employee

When you express your appreciation, you are basically saying, “I notice you. You are important. You are significant. You are making a difference.” Acknowledging others comes with wonderful benefits. When we express appreciation, we have to think positively, at least for that moment. The more we acknowledge and appreciate others, the more positive moments we have. Over time, that makes us feel better about those around us and about ourselves.

Developing an organizational culture of appreciation may sound like a lofty goal, but it’s worth the effort. Once it gets going, appreciation is contagious. It creates positive feelings in the person saying thanks and in the one receiving it.

Do you know anyone who has ever left a job (or a relationship) because they received too much appreciation? Of course not! Now think about the people you know who have left jobs – despite a good salary and benefits – because they didn’t feel appreciated for the work they did or failed to see how they made a

difference. Managers often think a salary increase is what employees value most – and for some that may be the case – but for most, receiving appreciation is even more important.

Four Keys to Effective Appreciation

To ensure that your expressions of praise and appreciation have a significant impact, remember these four keys: ISOS:

I = IMMEDIATE

Express your appreciation immediately, even if it is over the phone or via e-mail. Often we want to do something special to show our appreciation, but that can take time. It's important to act quickly, even if it is a small token gesture. You can always do more later. If you don't do something immediately, the person you appreciate may feel unappreciated. Seize the moment. Do it right away.

S = SPECIFIC

Make the acknowledgement specific. Rather than saying, "Thanks for all your help," say, "Thanks for the detail you put into the report. It obviously took a tremendous amount of time and dedication." Being specific adds importance and validity to the appreciation.

O = OFTEN

Few people have ever suffered from too much appreciation, but many enough. Don't be stingy. Offer it frequently, appropriately, and creatively.

S = SINCERE

Say it only if you mean it. People are smart, and they can tell if you are faking it. A sincere expression of appreciation that comes from the heart is a powerful motivator.

Make It a Habit

There's an exercise I sometimes do with my seminar attendees to help them practice the power of appreciation. I ask everyone to write down sincere compliments and "thank yous" for their co-workers. At first it feels like a silly game, but after a while people feel less awkward and begin to enjoy it. The exercise opens up lines of communication. During debriefing

at the end of the seminar, people always talk about the unexpected results of this exercise. Some participants even save the notes of appreciation for years.

Many of us inherently understand the power of appreciation, but few of us practice it regularly. To successfully develop the habit of acknowledging others and expressing appreciation, ask everyone in your office to commit to appreciating five people a day for one month.

Sticky notes are a great way to express one's appreciation. We all have them in our offices and all it takes is a quick note to say "thank you." Adhere the note to a good report or memo you've just reviewed, or stick a note on your co-worker's computer monitor or chair. However you do it, the note will always be received positively. People do save these notes and soon, you may even see these sticky-notes covering one's office wall!

The Greatest Gift

Benjamin Disraeli said, "The greatest good you can do for another is not to share your riches, but to reveal theirs." That is the job of any leader – of a family, of a team, of a department, or of a company. Reveal the riches in others by expressing appreciation for what you see.

Remember to say thank you. The gift of appreciation is the greatest gift you can give. Tell someone today what a difference they have made in your life. Then watch the difference you make in theirs.

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