



The Power of Appreciation

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Why is it important?

In the coaching work I do with executives, one of the behaviors they are often criticized for is not expressing appreciation and recognition to their team members. This seems like an obvious omission of effective leadership behavior. Yet it is happening with seasoned managers. When pointed out they usually say, "I thought people knew I valued their contributions. I am not doing this intentionally. We are under such pressure to get things done that I just don't think to express my appreciation for what they are doing on a daily basis."

We have all met managers during our lives in organizations who have said, "If you don't hear anything, assume that you're doing a good job". This never worked well with me. And it surely doesn't work with today's knowledge based workers who rely on praise and recognition to determine what the organization really values. Recognition is a key communication vehicle for what the manager (and the company) sees as important.

Expressing appreciation for what another person is doing and contributing to the team is one of the most powerful forms of recognition in organizational life. The Gallup Organization conducted a multi-year research effort to identify the dimensions of the work place that were consistent with high performance and employee satisfaction. Providing recognition and appreciation was identified as one of the top twelve factors. Companies that use the Gallup Q12 survey have found that receiving praise is one of the items that consistently receive the lowest rating from employees.

Expressing appreciation is valuable in all of our relationships. Gottman reports from his research on marriage relationships that "expressed appreciation" between marital partners is one of the cornerstones of thriving marriages. He found that even in strong relationships too often people focus on the negative in an effort to make the relationship all the better. But by dwelling on what is wrong it is easy to lose sight of what is right.

A few suggestions

Recognition can be positive or negative. However positive and negative recognition aren't opposites. Instead, the opposite of recognition is being ignored.



The characteristics of effective recognition are that it's sincere, immediately connected to performance and specific about what is being praised. Many formal recognition programs don't work because they don't give employees a clear picture of what, exactly, is being recognized—such as customer satisfaction or profitability.

A personal experiment of mine

I have been putting this into practice myself. As I read the research I noticed that I was falling into the same trap as the managers mentioned above. I don't have direct reports but I do have clients, colleagues, family members and people that I meet in my daily life. At first I watched my responses as I saw people doing things around me. As I became more self aware, I began to nudge myself to say something when I noticed an action from a person that I appreciated or admired. As I have gotten more comfortable in this new mode, I have become more "consciously competent" at giving praise. I am committed to practicing this "reaching out" to others so that it will become a new habit that will become a natural part of my interactions with others.

What have I discovered?

I feel more engaged and less held back. I am more energized. I notice more about what is going on around me instead of being preoccupied with my thoughts or my list of next things to accomplish. I get surprise looks from strangers. I get smiles from others. I have interesting conversations with some people as they respond to my words of appreciation. Colleagues tell me they appreciate my pointing out what I have noticed and that it helps them to recognize what they take for granted about themselves.

I am generating positive emotions in myself and positive emotions in others. Expressing appreciation and gratitude to others has a beneficial impact on us as individuals. It also has significant implications for us as leaders in organizational settings.

A challenge to you

Here is my challenge to you: Look for what others are doing right. Appreciate it (don't fake it). Express it! Watch what happens to you and to the lucky receivers of your appreciation!! Then let me know what you discover.

John Cronkite works with leaders faced with the challenge of implementing change that will be sustained over time. Sustaining change requires effective leadership and top performing people. John will provide you with practical, hands on coaching and consulting to build your confidence and effectiveness at providing this leadership and bringing the best from your people. To contact John send an email to cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com and for more information about John and his work visit his website at www.dirigoconsulting.com.