

January 2013 Resolution for the New Year: Show More Appreciation

There are motivational theories galore based on decades of research that would support your managerial efforts. Knowing how busy you are, however, this one-pager offers a simple-to-use idea that can be easily put into practice every day. Try it.

Scenario #1: You worked really hard and did a very good job on something you were asked to do. On completion, your contribution was acknowledged and obviously appreciated.

Scenario #2: Same situation, except you got no feedback, no appreciation, and you have no way to know if your work was valued or not.

How would each of these scenarios leave you feeling?

Psychologist Abraham Maslow, in his groundbreaking work that lays out a hierarchy of needs*, places recognition/acknowledgement/appreciation and the resulting self-esteem near the top of the hierarchy. Does your experience bear this out? We would like to believe that our personal sense of satisfaction when we do quality work is reward enough, but that wouldn't be the whole story. Appreciation from others – and especially from someone we report to – makes a difference. Having our contribution recognized makes us feel good about ourselves and spurs us on to earn further appreciation. Does this ring true? Does acknowledgement from your manager (or its absence) influence your motivation?

Consider this: If your direct reports were to honestly and anonymously write two lists, one headed "You motivated me when . . ." and the other headed "You reduced my motivation when . . ." what actions or behaviors of yours do you think they would put under each heading?

This mental exercise probably resulted in a few surprises. Reviewing daily interactions from the perspective of our employees rather than from our own generally presents us with different data. Of course we do from our point of view what we think is appropriate. Otherwise we wouldn't do it. From our employees' point of view, however, the simple yet important element of appreciation may not have shown up on the radar. Think back over the past few weeks and ask yourself if there have been instances of good performance that you failed to acknowledge. Perhaps you took it for granted, perhaps you thought your employee would intuit your appreciation without having to be told, perhaps you made a mental note to include this when performance evaluation time comes around or perhaps there were so many other things on your mind that the occasion for appreciation simply slipped by unnoticed.

You can limber up your appreciation muscles by identifying ten opportunities you have in the course of daily activities to make your employees feel appreciated. It doesn't have to be a big deal: a simple "Thank you, this helps me" or a "thumbs up" with a smile can do it. Appreciation is reinforced by letting the employee know how the performance impacts your work, or how the well-done task fits into the big picture of the unit's goals, or by referring back to the valued performance on a later occasion.

Look for opportunities to appreciate those around you for even the simple tasks. Those are often viewed as thankless jobs, yet they help us get our jobs done so we can serve our citizens.

* www.abraham-maslow.com/m_motivation/Hierarchy_of_Needs.asp