

Why Do I Have To Praise People for Just Doing Their Jobs?

And Other Questions Leaders Have about Appreciation

By Liz Uram

Do you ever feel like there's way too much appreciation going on in your workplace? If you said no, you're definitely not alone. Your team would probably say the same thing.

A Gallup survey revealed that 65% of employees haven't received recognition in the past year. This correlates to studies that report that 2/3 of American workers are disengaged.

Employees who don't receive recognition are 51% more likely to look for another job. That means they're less motivated to produce more and better work and less likely to respect you as a leader.

It's easy to see that one of the most important skills a leader can have is the ability to give positive feedback. This is also one of the most underdeveloped leadership skills. The reason is that many leaders just don't know where to start.

Here are the five most common questions leaders have about giving praise:

Why should I praise people for simply doing their jobs?

Two words – positive reinforcement. If you want people to keep doing their jobs, you must let them know their work is appreciated. Keep this phrase in mind: What gets rewarded gets repeated.

One study concluded that 81% of employees would produce better work more often if they received personal recognition for their efforts. That seems like a good return on investment for a few sincere words of appreciation.

I don't need praise, why do they?

Everyone has different internal drives that determine what motivates them. Recognition is one of the top motivators along with: challenging work, growth opportunities, job security, being part of a team, and compensation.

If you happen to be motivated by growth opportunities, you may not understand why someone needs a pat on the back. You might even think they're being needy. Beware. That

kind of thinking is a barrier to your own growth and could hold you back from achieving your goals.

The best leaders understand that everyone is different. They meet people where they are, without judgment.

How do I give praise without sounding phony?

The secret to meaningful recognition is to make it sincere, specific, and timely:

Sincere: This part is easy. If you're specific, timely, and genuine with your praise you'll automatically come across as sincere.

Specific: Go beyond a generic "Good job!" Instead, say something like this: "Thanks for taking the initiative to help John get that order out. I really appreciate your teamwork." People are more likely to repeat a behavior when they know what the praise is for.

Timely: Say it as close to the event as possible. If you wait, it loses its impact. Follow this rule: When you see it, say it.

Should I praise in public or in private?

You should give your praise where the employee is most comfortable. A few people hate public praise, but most people love it.

And yet many leaders hesitate to give public recognition. They worry it will create jealousy or resentment. Forget those fears.

One benefit of praising in public is that it shows the lower performers what's possible. It can be the shot in the arm they need to step up. Look for opportunities to give shout-outs for positive behaviors, both big and small, in public. Doing so creates a culture of appreciation.

Once you've built such a culture, you'll notice team members praising each other, which will result in even greater morale and trust. One study shows that 90% of employees agree that team spirit is increased when the leader provides appreciation and support.

How often should I offer praise?

We know that once-a-year praise isn't enough, but what's a good amount? That's a good question because praising too often can be as bad as not praising often enough. Running around giving high-fives, thumbs up, and generic "thanks" is exhausting for you and uninspiring to your team.

A good rule of thumb is to provide positive praise to each person on your team once a week. I know what you're

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thinking: Some people aren't doing anything worth praising on a weekly basis. Look harder.

Did your chronically tardy employee show up to the meeting on time? Show that you appreciate the effort.

What about the people who come in day after day and do their job? Nothing more, nothing less. They get the job done and you need them. Let them know you appreciate being able to count on them.

The benefits of appreciation are clear: increased retention, motivated team members who work hard, and respect for you as a leader. Start catching people in the act of doing things right. Who knows, maybe you'll get the appreciation you deserve as well!

Liz Uram (lizuram.com) is a nationally recognized speaker, trainer, consultant, and author. She equips leaders with the tools they need to make a bigger impact, get better results, and motivate others to do their best. With over 20 years of experience, she's developed systems that work. Her books are packed full of strategies for leaders.

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Five Languages of Appreciation

The authors of *The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* (appreciationatwork.com) tell us that every person has a primary “language of appreciation.”

Here are the five languages and how to use them to be sure that everyone feels appreciated.

1. Tangible Gifts. The key here is to find something meaningful to give. It might be tickets to a sporting event, gift cards to restaurants, or certificates to a spa. To those who value this form of appreciation, the right gift sends a powerful message of support. A quick survey will help you learn what gift would be best for each person.

2. Quality Time. Give someone your focused attention. Suggest a one-on-one lunch, or stop by someone's desk for a conversation, and take time to listen.

3. Acts of Service. Offer to help out. Perhaps pitch in to help people complete a project or bring food when they're working long hours. Ask, “Is there anything I can do that would make your work easier?” Then follow through.

4. Words of Affirmation. Praise for a job well done can be highly motivating, as long as it's heart-felt.

5. Physical Touch. Yes, there's a limited number of situations involving touch that are appropriate in work settings. But many moments are enhanced with a high five, pat on the back, or friendly hand on the shoulder. If someone stiffens at a touch, you know that physical touch won't be received as appreciation, and you can move on to other languages.

To discover which language each person prefers, have everyone complete the Motivating by Appreciation Inventory (mbainventory.com). Or simply try out the languages on people and see how they respond. Keep a file of people's preferred languages.

It takes less time to encourage each person than to put on large appreciation events that miss the mark for many people. Although most people will accept appreciation in all five languages, they won't feel truly encouraged unless the message is communicated through their primary language. 

