

Thanksgiving Should Happen More Often

Thanksgiving was early this year and I cannot believe it has already passed. Talking about what we are thankful for is a family tradition for most people on Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season. As the pace of life and business has increased, reflection on what we are thankful for can easily move to the bottom of the list the rest of the year. In my experience, great leaders set aside time for the topic in their personal life and in the workplace. More than just setting aside time, they understand why gratitude, appreciation and recognition are important.

Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

Gratitude is the acknowledgment of what is valuable and meaningful to you combined with being thankful for it. Gratitude is a positive emotion that can be the consequence of receiving something from someone else or it can be an emotional state of living in thankfulness. Integrating gratitude into your daily life is good goal to have and since it is an emotional muscle, it will be strengthened with use. Here are some things I suggest you do to foster a sense of gratitude.

Make a list – Name the things and people in your life that you are thankful for. I find that I am happier when I focus on the what I already have versus focusing only on what I want to have. A list also reminds me that I am dependent on others and that my connection to them is important.

Listen to yourself – Catch yourself when you say things like, “I have to” which makes the task a burden or “this will never work” which makes the problem permanent. The language you use to describe a situation impacts your

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. *Thanksgiving Should Happen More Often*
2. *Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude*
3. *Why Use Recognition*
4. *Public Courses*

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attitude. It is not about being optimistic, but about recognizing the benefits you receive from “getting to do” something or the growth you can have from finding a solution a solution.

Manage your calendar – Keep track of all the things you need to get done. Time is a gift we are given each day and is something to be grateful for. I feel less overwhelmed and burdened when I prioritize my list based on the benefits that I will receive when the task is complete and also on the things that I have control over. I have found that when I over commit, not only do I think less about what I am grateful for, but I also do not recognize other people’s contributions as often.

Why Use Recognition

The words “recognition” and “appreciation” have similar meanings and are words I use interchangeable. Recognition can be an awareness or acknowledgement you have of admiration, approval or gratitude for something or someone. From a leadership standpoint, the expression of that recognition or appreciation is vital and a part of giving feedback. It is also reciprocal in that as a human we need to feel appreciated and we need to show appreciation. I do not think it is something that can be faked and will not be received well if it is not genuine.

I use the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) Assessment frequently in my work. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, developed the assessment to evaluate how leaders engage in the five practices they identified as exemplary leadership: model the way, inspired a shared vision, challenge the process, enable other to act, and encourage the heart. Encourage the heart is about recognition and appreciation. The authors site this practice as having the most long-lasting impact because, “genuine acts of caring draw people forward.” Another way they say it is, “people need emotional fuel to replenish their spirits.”

They say one part of recognizing contributions is to expect the best which means believing in people's ability and potential success. The other part is to personalize recognition which starts with getting to know the people better. I have found the saying true, people don't quit their company or job, they quit their boss.

In my newsletter last February, I talked about expressing appreciation at work from the context of Dr. Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*. Chapman contends that individuals use different emotional languages when communicating. People like to receive appreciation and be rewarded in ways they recognize as most values. The five ways of expressing appreciation in the workplace are: words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, tangible gifts and physical touch. Kouzes and Posner affirm Chapman and say, "to able to deliver the appropriate type of recognition, leaders need to learn about the motivations of each constituent" and to do that you, "first have to get to know your constituents."

Another way to look at it is how, when and why you give recognition. Kouzes and Posner say that, "one of the more common complaints about recognition is that it's far too often highly predictable, mundane, and impersonal." I have found that incorporating recognition more often contributes to a positive work environment. Recognition is not flattery and I am not suggesting you go around giving high fives all day instead of being a leader. Use the following list of things to remember about recognition to reflect on how well you give recognition and how you like to receive it. Things to remember about recognition.

1. **Human worth** – Highlight the inherent good in the people you work with. You need to celebrate the employee who is caring or creative as well as the top performer. These types of interactions create community and connection.
2. **Descriptive** – Specify what people are doing to contribute. A blanket good job does not highlight the task or skill that was used.
3. **In all directions** – Do not make appreciation hierarchal. People want to be appreciated by their bosses, coworkers and the people who report to them.
4. **During busy times** – Motivate others during the peaks in business. Motivation can come from recognition and when everyone is at their busiest is when it can be most needed.
5. **In private** – Incorporate recognition into your emails, phone calls and in one-on-one meetings. One easy way is to acknowledge the time that the other person is spending communicating with you.
6. **Include more people** – Recognize the collective work of a team. This is important at all stages of the team from forming a cohesive team to watching the team achieve its purpose.

7. **In public** – Reinforce recognition with formal award or public announcement. When your workforce or team is remote or in different locations, this is especially important.
8. **Good amid bad** – Express the areas of strength you witnessed even when the outcome was not a success. Failure is a place of growth and highlighting only the negative will not lead to future success.
9. **Timely** – Catch people in the act of doing something good. If good feedback is only part of the yearly review process, employees will feel frustrated instead of appreciated.
10. **Take it further** – Mentor someone after you recognize them. Encouragement and career development are natural conversations to have on the heels of recognizing good work.
11. **Create fun** – Use recognition to add some excitement. Think outside the box and get creative and your employees will appreciate the extra effort and environment it creates.
12. **Include all levels** – Remember every job is critical. The need for recognition is the same for the salaried employee as it is for the behind the scene hourly worker.

As an executive coach, one of the first things I do with clients is get them to think about their personal values. I find that recognition is a top value for a lot of my clients. What recognition means to them can vary. Some people identify it as a need to receive attention, approval or respect from others. Other people identify it more by the social aspect of being recognized as part of the group or team. As a leader it is important to remember that there are no cookie-cutter values. If your company says that recognition is one of their core values, then you need to define what that means to you and then integrate it into all employee-related processes and in multiple ways.

A successful manager taps into talents and resources with the purpose of supporting and bringing out the best in the individual and team. An executive coach can help you maximize the human talent present in your company regardless of where they work. If you're interested in exploring a coaching relationship contact Bill Burtch at Harmony for a consultation at 901-272-7390 or bburtch@harmonycc.net

Suggested Reading

Love'em or Lose'em: Getting Good People To Stay by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans

The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner



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Schedule of Public Courses

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Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
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TBD Spring 2019

