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1

YOUR LEADERS AREN'T INTERESTED

Mark was getting tired of the meeting. As president of the company, technically the monthly executive team discussion was "his" meeting, but now he was feeling antsy and eager to get back to his office to deal with some pressing items. Too many decisions funneled through this team, he thought. It wasn't efficient. He looked at the clock and said, "Okay, what's next?"

Scott, the COO, responded, "One more topic and then a few housekeeping items. We are going to hear a report and proposal from HR on implementing an appreciation program for the employees."

"I thought we already had a fairly robust employee recognition program that costs us a pretty penny every year," Mark said in a not-very-interested tone of voice. "Why do we need something else?"

Debbie, the CFO, spoke up. "We don't. We pay our employees at a level *above* the regional average, and they have a pretty nice benefits package, even with insurance premiums skyrocketing. *That* should make them feel appreciated!"

"Well, we have Amber waiting outside," cautioned Scott.

"Let her in," said Mark.

Amber was the young, newly hired director of human talent management—"a fancy name for training director," Debbie had once

commented. Amber came in and launched her PowerPoint presentation, sharing the results from the employee engagement survey that showed that a vast majority of the firm's employees did not feel valued or appreciated. She had done some research and found that this was the case for many companies within their industry, and that traditional employee recognition programs that focused on rewarding years of service or giving an occasional "above and beyond" award didn't really have much impact on most staff.

She then went on to offer some ideas on how managers and supervisors can communicate authentic appreciation. But what got the group's attention was her statement that "Appreciation pays off for a company. We have data that show positive results across the board—improved attendance, less turnover, more compliance to policies, higher customer service ratings." She offered appropriate supporting documentation and distributed an outline of her proposed plan to launch the appreciation training.

After Amber concluded and left the room, Mark said, "Well, that was better than I thought it would be, and it seems reasonable to at least explore the idea—maybe introducing it on a limited scope at first."

"I'll look into it," Debbie said. "The research seems a little 'soft' to me—but if the data supports the financial benefits she claims, then we can look at it." She then gathered up the materials and put them into her briefcase, where they were quickly "filed" after the meeting. The documents never saw the light of day again, and Amber never heard anything more about her presentation.

Whenever I speak to a group of employees, supervisors, or HR managers, inevitably I'm asked one or more of the following questions.

"What am I supposed to do if our management team isn't interested in appreciation? They are focused on achieving goals and the bottom line—they think communicating appreciation is stupid and a waste of time."

"Recognizing employees for anything (except for how many years

they've been an employee) is just not part of our culture. Any suggestions on how to introduce the idea?"

In an awkward way, this may be somewhat comforting—to hear that others often experience the same lack of interest or support that you do ("I'm not the only one!"). Conversely, it can also become discouraging if you start to think, *"Do you mean that hardly anyone is interested in helping employees feel valued and appreciated?"* In reality, a lot of business owners and managers *do* want to learn (and teach their employees) how to communicate authentic appreciation effectively.

But, at the same time, within virtually every organization, there are individuals who don't understand what we mean by "authentic appreciation" (usually confusing it with traditional employee recognition), or truly don't see the value of helping employees feel appreciated.

Sometimes leaders seem to want a positive, vibrant organization without providing the foundational components necessary to build one. Common responses fall along these lines:

"We pay them—that's how we show them we appreciate them. If they need to be praised for every little thing they do to keep motivated, they should find another job."

"I don't care if they feel good about themselves or not. My goal isn't to make them happy. My goal is to get the work done and out the door."

"THIS IS A MANUFACTURING plant. Tell them to go work for Apple or Google if they want to play Ping-Pong."

"I never got a pat on the back, and I turned out fine. People these days need to grow up and live in reality."

"We don't have the time or money. We're just trying to stay afloat. This is a manufacturing plant. Tell them to go work for Apple or Google if they want to play Ping-Pong."

WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG ABOUT APPRECIATION

Many leaders, however, aren't opposed to appreciation. They just don't understand how it really works. In essence, they need accurate information about what communicating appreciation really looks like in daily work life, what it isn't, and what they can realistically expect appreciation to accomplish in their organization.

"Appreciation" has become a major buzzword in many workplaces —to the point that there have been numerous commercials in the media boasting "We Appreciate You" (often in the context of employees to customers).

In recent years, the emphasis has been more on employee recognition, with numerous books, articles, seminars, and even whole companies committed to helping leaders and managers recognize their team members for work well done. In fact, experts in human resource management estimate 90 percent of all businesses and organizations in the United States have some form of employee recognition program.[1]

The problem is—in terms of helping employees feel truly valued and appreciated—employee recognition programs have failed. While recognition and reward programs have proliferated, the level of employee engagement in job satisfaction has actually *declined* over the same time period. This is largely because most employee recognition activities are generic (everyone gets the same award organizationally in contrast to being individualized and personal) and, ultimately, come across as inauthentic.

As a result, many organizations are now focusing on emphasizing authentic, personal appreciation. While this is a step in the right direction, many leaders still have misconceptions about what appreciation is and is not. Here are the three major misconceptions we've come across.

MISCONCEPTION #1:
MONEY IS THE #1 MOTIVATOR FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

This belief is reflected when a leader responds to the suggestion of exploring how to effectively communicate appreciation to employees with the remark: "We pay them. That's their appreciation."

While we all need to make *enough* money to support ourselves and our families, many business owners and managers believe their employees are motivated primarily by making *more* money. This belief stems partly from leaders assuming that their staff is driven by the same motivator(s) they are—earning more money, enjoying nicer possessions, gaining social status, and having the ability to make decisions. (It is important to note that some leaders, often entrepreneurs and salespersons, *are* motivated by money.)

The truth is, *money isn't an effective motivator for many people*. And the research is definitive. When reviewing over ninety studies over a time span of 120 years, the results found that the relationship between salary level and job satisfaction is very weak—how much money employees make accounts for only 2 percent of the factors contributing to how much they enjoy their work.[2]

In fact, some research has actually shown that, in some cases, when financial rewards are increased, intrinsic motivation (the drive from within a person to complete tasks) actually *decreases*.[3] Employee engagement has been found to be three times more strongly related to intrinsic motivators than extrinsic rewards,[4] and intrinsic motivation is a stronger predictor of job performance than extrinsic rewards.[5] The point? *Motivating solely by money doesn't get you much.*

Another study, completed by the McKinsey consulting group, found that *non-monetary incentives were more motivating to employees than monetary rewards*. They found that praise from the employee's manager, attention from leaders, and the opportunity to lead projects were more motivating and rewarding than financial incentive, whether

it was an increase in base salary, bonuses, or stock options.[6]

And these studies don't even address the differences in motivation among millennial employees—where research clearly shows just making more money isn't what drives them.[7] They are more focused on making a difference in the world, growing personally and professionally, and having a satisfactory work/life balance.

MISCONCEPTION #2: *THE PRIMARY GOAL OF COMMUNICATING APPRECIATION IS TO MAKE EMPLOYEES HAPPY*

This belief position seems to be held more frequently by individuals on the cynical side, who tend to say things like, "Work is about getting things done . . . I don't care how people feel about it."

Unfortunately, there is some basis for holding this belief. In the world of encouragement and positive thinking, some well-meaning individuals have taken the appreciation emphasis to the point of having a goal of making everyone happy. In fact, some workplaces have established the position of "Chief Happiness Officer."

As a psychologist, I can easily assert that attempting to make others happy is, and will always be, an endeavor doomed to fail. Why? Because no one can make anyone else happy. We actually can't even *make* ourselves happy! Happiness is a result of other positive habits in our lives.

We now know that our feeling responses are essentially a result of whether our expectations are met in real life. If they are met, we are pleased; if they are not met, we become frustrated, angry, or disappointed. Although we can assist people in learning to adjust their expectations more closely to reality and develop a greater sense of gratefulness, no one can make anyone else feel anything.

MISCONCEPTION #3: *THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATING APPRECIATION IS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY*

The third mistaken belief about communicating appreciation in the workplace has grown out of a distorted view of recognition and its benefits. When recognition experts and researchers began to share the positive financial benefits that occur when people feel valued, business leaders who were excited about the results started focusing primarily on the fiscal aspects.

Research has consistently demonstrated a strong return on investment in response to employees being recognized and feeling appreciated, including:

- increased daily attendance (not a small factor for retail stores and fast food restaurants);
- decreased tardiness;
- employees following policies and procedures more faithfully;
- reduced conflict among staff;
- increased productivity (in some work settings); and
- higher customer satisfaction ratings.

These benefits all add up to save companies money and make them more competitive in the marketplace. In fact, high staff turnover has been shown to be the single greatest nonproductive cost to businesses.

But when the *purpose* of appreciation is driven primarily (or in some cases, solely) by financial factors, the game changes. Some employees believe management is using the idea of "recognition" with the ulterior motive of increasing productivity, and therefore profits (and, not incidentally, manager bonuses). As a result, in the world of employee recognition we're seeing a huge pushback from employees and some managers.

THE TRUE PURPOSE FOR COMMUNICATING APPRECIATION

What then is the real purpose of communicating appreciation for those with whom you work? Ultimately, this is a personal issue for each individual: *Why do* I *communicate a sense of appreciation to my colleagues?*

Multiple reasons exist, including some that are self-serving, but fundamentally, ***appreciation for colleagues communicates respect and value for the person.*** People are not solely "work units" whose primary value is derived from how much they produce (although some cultures, businesses, and bosses still view employees as expendable resources used to create financial gain, similar to burning coal to create electricity). Authentic appreciation flows from valuing employees as *people*—encompassing not only their capabilities and what they accomplish, but also how they enhance the work of the team and, finally, who they are.

It's important to note that the appreciation doesn't always have to be for the work they do. Some individuals are appreciated by their colleagues for just "who they are." For example, some employees brighten up the office because of their cheerful demeanor and positive outlook. Others are appreciated because of their calm attitude and ability to think through the issues in the midst of a crisis. And some are respected for what they do outside of work—a single mother committed to her family, an individual who gives a lot to the community through volunteerism, or someone who demonstrates self-discipline by training for a marathon.

Interestingly, when employees feel valued (whether or not the characteristic is work-related), good results follow. Not only do work-related behaviors improve, but employees who feel appreciated are easier to get along with—they are less irritable, more willing to listen, and more open to change. As hundreds of businesses and organizations have discovered, appreciation is a low-cost way to reward and motivate others, socially reinforcing the fact that what they do and who they are matters.

When appreciation is communicated from the perspective that

each employee has value as a person, in addition to the contributions they make to the organization, all stakeholders win—the employee, the supervisor, the organization, customers and clients, as well as the family and friends of the employee who get to enjoy a more positive, encouraged individual.

YOU GET IT, MANAGEMENT DOESN'T

You may be saying to yourself, "I get it. I agree! I see the importance and value of showing employees that they are appreciated, but my bosses don't. What you are describing is *not* how they think about employees. How can I help them see the value of appreciation? Can I? Is it even possible?"

To answer these questions, let's first look at and understand the nature of resistance.

Resistance to change (or a new program) can be displayed by team members at any level of the organization—the owner, executives, managers, supervisors, frontline employees. When individuals don't demonstrate much interest in learning how to build a culture of appreciation, or sometimes actively oppose it, their response can be accurately described as "resistance." Either actively or passively, they are resisting doing something new and different.

Different models have been developed to understand the nature of resistance, but one of the most practically useful has been proposed by Rick Maurer in his notable book, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*. Maurer offers three primary reasons why people resist change:

1. "I don't get it."—a lack of information or understanding.
2. "I don't like it."—their emotional reaction to how the change impacts them.
3. "I don't like you."—a result of a lack of relationship and/or trust.[8]

Therefore, resistance to change continues to occur in organizations when the issues at each level have not been addressed. Sufficient information and explanation isn't given. Managers don't listen to and acknowledge the emotional impact of the proposed changes on the employees. A general lack of relational connectedness or a lack of trust in the management (related to their motives or competence) is present.

Maurer submits that resistance is usually only addressed at the informational level, with the proponents of change believing that if they explain the context and reason for the change factually, and how the change will occur, that should be sufficient. Typically, this approach isn't effective.

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"Just the same, it's nice to get an award."

In fact, this ongoing resistance can irritate leaders. Jonathan, the HR manager in charge of employee engagement, complained: "What do these people want? We've told them why we want to launch this training. We've explained how it will make the work environment more positive for everyone. And I've outlined a specific process for how we can slowly phase this in over time. What else do they need?"

Many leaders believe successful organizations are the result of wise decisions and implementation, and that good decisions come from accurate information (which is generally true). Thus, they tend to focus on facts and data. But when dealing with *people*, simply having the facts isn't sufficient.

Resistance to change includes employees' emotional reactions to how their lives will be impacted and is also affected by the level of trust in relationships. A deeper resistance remains even when they understand the facts of the situation. For example, Erin reported to her supervisor: "I know this new direction and way of doing things makes sense intellectually. Eventually, the workflow will be smoother, there will be less confusion, and it should make us more efficient. But I still don't like it—partly because it feels like the changes are being shoved down my throat."

ALL OR NOTHING?

An additional problem related to resistance is the way that we talk about it, which is usually in "all or nothing" terms. When a manager isn't too excited about having his work group go through the Appreciation at Work training, the HR trainer may report: "He's against it" or "It's not going to happen—no way." Or if the manager is willing to pursue the training, the facilitator may state to her colleagues: "We're good to go. She's on board and it is full speed ahead!"

The reality in both situations is probably somewhere in the middle. The "anti-appreciation" manager may have some reservations, or feel

now is not the right time. But to conclude "it's never going to happen" may be an overstatement. Similarly, the supportive manager may be willing to have her team go through the training process, but may have some unspoken qualms and eventually may not really support implementing the appreciation concepts over time.

Therefore, it can be helpful to individuals who are trying to convince colleagues of the benefits of using the Appreciation at Work resources to first of all not overreact, and secondly, to gain a clearer sense of what their coworkers are thinking (and why). See the diagram below showing the continuum of positions a leader could have regarding acceptance of going through the training with their team, and the words that may be used to describe their position.

Continuum of Resistance Responses						
Not Going to Happen	**Highly Unlikely**	**Unlikely**	**Neutral**	**Possible**	**Probable**	**Definitely Will Happen**
Not on my watch.	Maybe some other time.	If we have the budget.	Maybe next year.	Let's look at next month.	Check the calendar	Let's get it on the schedule.
We are not doing it.	I'm not doing it.	You can, but I'm not going to.	You can look into it.	Ok, if that's what you want to do.	It will be good for us.	Let's do it!

If your manager starts out highly negative, don't necessarily give up. Try to move her up the continuum a couple of notches. You are more likely to get into the positive response realm from a neutral position than a hardcore negative one, so try to slowly move into the neutral zone first. (Suggested actions for doing so follow at the end of the chapter.)

WHEN STAFF FEEL APPRECIATED, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE DIMINISHES

Laying a foundation of appreciation with your colleagues can go a long way in helping them approach organizational changes with a more open mind. Interestingly, when employees feel truly appreciated for what they do and who they are, resistance to change can be reduced significantly.

First, when employees feel positively about themselves at work, they are able to hear the information presented about upcoming changes more clearly. They do not have the extra noise of internal distractions that gets in the way of being able to listen and "hear" the facts presented.

A sense of feeling valued, even in the midst of significant organizational change, can help ease employees' initial emotional reactions. Responses of intense anxiety, fear, or confrontational disagreement become less frequent. Keira shared in a team meeting with her supervisor, "This whole 'change thing' scares me. I'm not sure if it will work and I'm afraid that eventually my job won't be needed. But, Lisa, I know you work for what is best for all of us and if you say we should do it, I'll go along even though I have my doubts."

FEELING APPRECIATED CREATES ENERGY FOR CHANGE

Resistance takes energy (if you're a runner, think about how tired you become after running on a windy day). Since each of us has a limited amount of physical and emotional energy, resistance consumes energy needed for other tasks, including implementing the changes themselves. When resistance lessens, more energy becomes available for constructive tasks.

Also, communicating authentic appreciation among colleagues injects positive energy into a workplace. People become more energized.

They have a greater capacity for creative problem solving and persevering through difficult tasks. Team members work together more effectively.

Over the past three years, we have worked with a division of a large telecommunications company in training supervisors and frontline staff in how to effectively communicate authentic appreciation to one another. The company was then acquired by another firm, triggering major changes across the whole organization. During the transition, leaders, both midlevel managers and upper-level executives, observed and repeatedly commented on how much more smoothly the staff who had been trained in authentic appreciation adjusted to the changes than the divisions who did not have this foundation established.

IDEAS TO GET STARTED

Okay, you're interested. But where do you start? To be honest, there are no magic formulas here. Nothing works *every* time. But we do have a few practical suggestions that seem to help.

First, ***find out where you are (with regard to employees feeling appreciated).*** You can review the past year's employee engagement survey to see how your team responded to questions about feeling valued and appreciated. Alternatively, we have created a brief twenty-item rating scale that can be taken anonymously to assess the level of appreciation in a workplace (see it at www.appreciationatwork.com/aawrs). Or you can get input from key team members, talking with them individually: "What is your sense of how appreciated (or not) you think the team feels?"

Second, ***begin to educate your management about the importance of appreciation*** and how it can have a significant positive impact on numerous aspects of the organization (staff morale, attendance, turnover) and communicate authentic personal appreciation. Our book *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* has a chapter on the "ROI of Appreciation" and cites the research support for the financial and practical benefits organizations experience when their

staff feels truly valued. Share some of the articles we have published in high-level business publications or in your industry area. Show them some of the testimonials we have gathered from leaders. Make use of the free articles and introductory videos on our website (www.appreciationatwork.com).

Next, ***have realistic expectations.*** Not everyone is going to be super-excited about the 5 languages of appreciation, or even showing appreciation at work, in general. Having said that, some approaches are more likely to win friends and influence enemies than others will. Be patient and work your plan over time. Don't expect rapid results (that is, until a directive is sent to improve staff morale due to the low employee engagement survey results!).

Share from personal experience. People (in this case, friends, co-workers, your supervisor, or others) are more willing to listen to a story about *you* than they are to listen to a bunch of factual information. If you haven't read *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* or you haven't taken the Motivating by Appreciation Inventory, don't try to convince others by saying: "I heard this was really good. You should read it." That leads to going nowhere fast. Rather, try something like: "I've been reading this book that I'm finding pretty interesting. It shows you that not everyone feels appreciated in the same ways." STOP. Wait. Don't go on and on for five minutes. Throw a bit of information out there and see if there is any interest or response. If not, let them take the conversation where they want to . . . or change the topic ("how 'bout them Cubs?"). If they show some interest in the appreciation topic, share a little bit more or say something like: "After I read a bit more, I'll bring it in and let you take a look, if you are interested." But keep your comments short.

Scatter some resources in their path over time. Have the book at your desk, where they might see it sometime. Subscribe to our blog and occasionally forward an article to them with a comment: "I found this to be interesting, and thought you might like to see it." Or go to our website and find the page that has some of our introductory videos and

articles, and share one occasionally with them.

Begin to model showing appreciation to others. The best way to influence others is by our actions. If you really believe showing appreciation to others is helpful, start to do so with your workmates. You don't have to call attention to what you are doing. Typically, over time they will begin to notice your positive actions, and eventually may make a comment like: "You've really been supportive of me lately. I appreciate your comments and actions." Even if they don't ask you, "Have you been reading something that led to this?" this is a perfect opening to say, "I'm glad you noticed. I've been trying out some principles from a book I read. Can I share one of the main points I learned?" Be patient. They may not respond positively now, but they may come back in a day or two (knowing you won't "pounce" on them) and ask you to tell them about the book.

Gather together a few interested friends and begin to apply the concepts together as a group. It is difficult to model relational behaviors by yourself. Having a few colleagues work together can be significantly more impactful. Read the book together, take the Motivating by Appreciation Inventory, and begin to experiment in showing appreciation to one another in the languages important to each person. Talk about it together over lunch. Share what you are learning with your other colleagues. Often a bit of a buzz begins to build and someone brings up the topic in a staff meeting as a resource that the work group should explore.

Finally, don't try to get them to agree to a big project. Start with suggesting that you do a small pilot project with one group or department and see how it goes. We have found that starting small and building support and momentum over time is often the best strategy. There are a number of reasons this approach works well: a) you are really not asking your manager or supervisor to do anything, you are asking them to let *you* do something; b) you are not asking them to go "up the chain" and ask for some big, new program to be implemented; c) the cost (both financial and time) is relatively low; d) there is the potential that something good may come out of the process, in which case the

effort can spread to other areas under their supervision, OR they may get credit for a resource that is a low-cost way to improve staff morale across the organization!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Why do you think some managers and executives aren't interested in appreciation in the workplace?

Which misconception about appreciation do you think is most prevalent in your workplace?

- ☐ That appreciation won't work because people are primarily motivated by money.
- ☐ That people are primarily focused on having a "happy workplace" (even if you don't think that is a realistic goal).
- ☐ That the focus on appreciation is primarily to manipulate employees to work harder.
- ☐ Other _____

What reactions do you have to the statement that the primary purpose of communicating appreciation is to show respect and affirm the value of others?

What do you think about the idea that appreciation can be for "non-work-related" activities or for personal characteristics that don't necessarily improve work performance?

In your experience, which of the three primary reasons for resistance is the main reason managers resist pursuing appreciation in the workplace?

- ☐ A lack of information or understanding.
- ☐ Their emotional reaction to how the change may impact them.
- ☐ A lack of relationship or lack of trust.

When looking at the continuum of reactions to implementing a new idea or practice, where do you see leaders in your organization with regard to implementing the 5 languages of appreciation?

Not Going to Happen	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Highly Possible	Probable	Definitely Will Happen

Check the boxes you agree with.

- ☐ When people feel appreciated, their resistance diminishes.
- ☐ When employees feel valued, they trust others more easily.
- ☐ When team members feel truly appreciated, energy for creative problem solving increases.
- ☐ When employees don't feel valued, they are more likely to become discouraged and give up.

Which suggested action do you feel is most feasible for your workplace at this point in time?

- ☐ Complete an assessment to determine the level of appreciation reported by employees.
- ☐ Begin to share information about appreciation in the workplace with leaders and managers (articles, blogs, videos, chapters).
- ☐ Explore resources related to *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* myself and share what I am learning with others.
- ☐ Collaborate with one or two others to begin to apply *The 5 Languages of Appreciation* concepts in my workplace.
- ☐ Pursue setting up a pilot project with the Appreciation at Work training resources.

Consider using the Appreciation at Work Rating Scale[9] as a resource for this.