

Think “Small” About Giving Feedback

By Debra Hamilton

Everyone wants to be appreciated. According to management guru Ken Blanchard, we never outgrow this need, and even if it looks like we are independent and self-sufficient, the fact is we need others to help us feel valued.

Appreciation often comes in the form of recognition and praise. This type of feedback can be exchanged from manager to employee, as well as employee to employee. And don't forget to give praise to your boss when it's deserved—that's fair game as well. In fact, every person has the capacity to provide constructive feedback and appreciation to one another. When the work climate is rich with feedback, the company will see numerous benefits. For example, individuals who receive regular recognition and praise:

- Increase their individual productivity
- Increase engagement among their colleagues
- Are more likely to stay with their organization
- Receive higher customer satisfaction scores

Deliver Feedback in Small Doses

Feedback does not need to be a big event. To the contrary, feedback should be delivered in small doses. It can be as simple as a few words of genuine praise or a small celebration for a job well done. Think “small” and “often” about giving constructive feedback and it will become a healthy workplace habit. Here are some simple, yet powerful, forms of delivering such recognition and praise:

- Verbal praise
- Written praise
- Public praise
- Group/team recognition
- Celebrations
- Anniversaries/acknowledgments
- Thank you cards
- Visibility with upper management
- Bulletin board messages
- Charts and posters to highlight performance

Use Descriptive Language

People can absorb feedback that is specific and concrete more easily than feedback that is vague or run-of-the mill. For example, *Nice job with that presentation! Way to go!* can be replaced with: *I like how you delivered the monthly results at today's meeting. Your charts showed the key figures, and you answered our questions succinctly. Now we know where*

to cut back on our third quarter expenses. Well done! Using specific feedback helps to avoid judgmental feedback such as “good” or “bad.”

Use a 3 to 1 Ratio

In most organizations, the ratio of positive to negative feedback is inadequate and needs improvement. With such a focus on weaknesses, most people do not know what their strengths are. Whenever possible, use a three to one ratio where you give three pieces of constructive feedback to every one piece of negative or corrective feedback. Using descriptive language shows you are paying attention and value the recipient's work.

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