



APPRECIATING YOUR EMPLOYEES

BY STEPHANIE SCHAFFER, M.ED., LPCC, NCC | THE VILLAGE FAMILY SERVICE CENTER

Think of the last time you were told you did a good job at work. It likely sparked feelings of gratitude, happiness, and was a bright spot in your day. I bet it even motivated you to do more of what was recognized. Now think of a time when someone told you that they appreciated a *quality* of yours and how it made a difference in the work you do. That experience probably stuck with you more deeply.

All supervisors want their teams to be successful. When we incorporate appreciation into the team culture, we see significant results. I'd like to share with you three "rules" or guidelines when it comes to gratitude in the workplace. You may find you already use some of this with your employees.

RULE NO. 1: IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

Of course, compensation and benefits are part of the package, but it is not at the top for most employees. The majority of the research from the last decade will show that it is relationships in the workplace (camaraderie), intrinsic desire to do a good job, feeling encouraged and recognized, and a feeling of having a real impact with the work one does that motivates employees to excel in the workplace over other things like compensation, company vision, etc.

In fact, global studies performed over 10 years with 200,000 people revealed that 79% of people who quit their jobs cited "lack of appreciation" as the reason for leaving, and that recognition is the number one thing their supervisors could give them that would inspire them to do great work.

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RULE NO. 2: RECOGNITION IS NOT THE SAME AS APPRECIATION

Recognition involves highlighting a person's performance or actions. Appreciation goes beyond recognition and is the combination of recognizing performance and the person's value. To put it simply: Recognition + Value = Appreciation.

As a counselor, all of my work is focused on relationships in some way, and with relationships comes communication. Just as there are different languages we speak – English, Spanish, German, French, etc. – there are different ways we communicate appreciation. Gary Chapman authored “The Five Love Languages,” which became a popular concept in romantic relationships. The premise is that we have different ways we show love, care, and affection. These same concepts can apply to the workplace, and so Chapman and Paul White co-authored “The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace.” The languages they propose are: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Tangible Gifts, and Physical Touch. (Yes, there is appropriate touch in the workplace.)

Here's a description of each of these five languages and how they may look at work:

- **WORDS OF AFFIRMATION:** Unsolicited, genuine compliments. This is the spoken language of appreciation. What you say and how you say it matters.

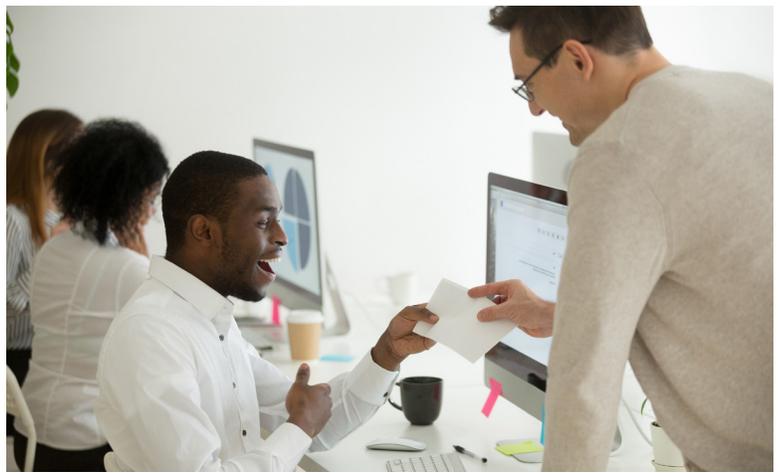
“I REALLY ENJOYED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THAT PROJECT.”

- **QUALITY TIME:** Focused attention, collaborating. An example could be scheduling a meeting and sticking to it, showing that you value that employee's time, and willingness to have a quality conversation.

“LET'S MEET AT 9 AM ON THURSDAY TO BRAINSTORM SOME IDEAS FOR THAT PROJECT.”

- **ACTS OF SERVICE:** Actions speak louder than words. Before providing assistance, it is critical to first ask if they need or want help. Consider the practice of random acts of kindness, voluntarily do something for the person you know they would appreciate.

“I'D LIKE TO ASSIST YOU WITH THIS PROJECT. IS THERE AN ASPECT YOU WOULD LIKE SOME HELP ON?”



- **TANGIBLE GIFTS:** Giving a gift that the person will value and knowing that it is truly the thought that counts. Of note, only 6% of employees identify tangible gifts as their primary language of appreciation, according to Chapman and White.

“HEY, I REMEMBERED YOU SAYING YOU REALLY LIKE SNICKERS, SO I GOT YOU ONE.”

- **PHYSICAL TOUCH:** A handshake, high five, fist bump, pat on the shoulder – these are examples of appropriate touch in the workplace. Also note that this, along with Tangible Gifts, is one of least identified languages.

“HEY JOE! GREAT JOB ON THAT PRESENTATION,” WITH A HANDSHAKE.

RULE NO. 3: BE THOUGHTFUL AND BE INTENTIONAL

Consider the “Platinum Rule” – to treat others the way *they* want to be treated. We learn at a young age that every person is different in many ways. We also learn that it is important to recognize and respect that fact. So whether you decide to apply the Five Languages of Appreciation or not, being thoughtful and individualizing your approach with your employees will go a long way.

Creating a culture of respect in a relationship, in a team, or in a workplace is essential for healthy people and a healthy work environment. A guaranteed way to foster that culture is in sharing appreciation for the qualities we admire about our team members. I can share from firsthand experience in the counseling office that significant improvements happen in relationships when these concepts are put into practice.



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“AS WE EXPRESS OUR **GRATITUDE**, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE HIGHEST APPRECIATION IS NOT TO UTTER WORDS, BUT TO **LIVE** BY THEM. ”

— JOHN F. KENNEDY

HOW GRATITUDE CAN TRANSFORM YOUR WORKPLACE

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From nonprofits to Fortune 500 companies, organizations are embracing a culture of gratefulness.

When consultant Stephanie Pollack was brought in to work with the state chapter of a national nonprofit, morale was low. The organization was in the middle of a transformation that brought in new leadership, a new culture, new rules – and lots of tension and uncertainty.

Her task? To teach appreciation and gratitude.

Over the course of a three-day retreat, she taught a small group of reluctant employees about the benefits of recognizing the good things in their lives and saying thank you. And something shifted. After one person wrote a genuine note of thanks on an “appreciation wall,” soon everyone was participating.

But what really surprised Pollack was the connection and authenticity that appreciation seemed to inspire. At the end of the retreat, some of the more closed-off employees opened up about the feelings and past experiences that had created their hard shells.

“They walked in with a lot of tension and frustration,” Pollack recounts. “I’m not saying they walked out with none, but there was a willingness on everyone’s part to move forward together in a different way.”

The practice of gratitude – and its close sibling, appreciation – has infiltrated workplaces, from new software companies to older institutions like Campbell Soup, whose former CEO wrote 30,000 thank you notes to his employees.

Though research on gratitude has exploded over the past two decades, studies of gratitude at work are still somewhat limited; results so far link it to more positive emotions, less stress and fewer health complaints, a greater sense that we can achieve our goals, fewer sick days, and higher satisfaction with our jobs and our coworkers.

While expressing thanks to colleagues might feel awkward or even at odds with some workplace cultures, many organizations have been developing innovative ways to overcome those barriers. Building on – and even getting out in front of – the existing research on gratitude at work, their efforts have identified concrete and important strategies for putting this research into practice. Their experiences suggest that building cultures of gratitude and appreciation can transform our work lives, leading to deeper connections to each other and to the work we’re doing.

WHY GRATITUDE IS SO REVOLUTIONARY

Researchers define appreciation as the act of acknowledging the goodness in life – in other words, seeing the positives in events, experiences, or other people (like our colleagues). Gratitude goes a step further: It recognizes how the positive things in our lives – like a success at work – are often due to forces outside of ourselves, particularly the efforts of other people.

This kind of thinking can seem countercultural in the realm of hierarchies and promotions, where everyone is trying to get ahead and may be reluctant to acknowledge their reliance on – or express emotions to – their co-workers.

“We tend to think of organizations as transactional places where you’re supposed to be ‘professional,’” says Ryan Fehr, an assistant professor of management at the University of Washington, Seattle, who published a paper summarizing the landscape of gratitude in business. “We may think that it’s unprofessional to bring things like forgiveness or gratitude or compassion into the workplace.”

Yet evidence suggests that gratitude and appreciation contribute to the kind of workplace environments where employees actually want to come to work and don’t feel like cogs in a machine.

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Appreciation is a cornerstone of the culture at Southwest Airlines, named by Forbes as America's No. 13 Best Employer of 2018. One way the company appreciates employees is by paying attention to special events in their personal lives – from kids' graduations to marriages to family illnesses – and recognizing those with small gestures like flowers and cards.

Southwest seems to understand what research has shown: that gratitude tends to emerge in workplaces with more “perceived organizational support,” where employees believe that the company values their contributions and cares about their well-being. And caring means valuing employee health and happiness for their own sake, not just as a way to eke out longer work hours and greater productivity.

Gratitude is “going to make your business more profitable, you're going to be more effective, your employees will be more engaged – but if that's the only reason you're doing it, your employees are going to think you're using them,” says Steve Foran, founder of the program Gratitude at Work. “You have to genuinely want the best for your people.”

Gratitude also can lead to more emotionally intelligent and empathic workplaces, where employees practice compassion and forgiveness.

“I see gratitude as a gateway drug to empathy in that it's very positive, it's easy to get started with,” says Peter Bonanno, director of program development at the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI), a nonprofit that offers training in mindfulness and emotional intelligence to individuals and teams.

Being grateful to someone who has helped you means that you recognize the intentions and effort behind their actions, which is good practice for the “putting yourself in someone else's shoes” involved in empathy.

Studies show that grateful employees are more concerned about social responsibility, for example. Grateful employees – as well as employees who receive more gratitude – also perform more “organizational citizenship” behaviors: kind acts that aren't part of their job description, like welcoming new employees and filling in for coworkers.

FOUR KEYS TO GRATITUDE AT WORK

Of course, not all attempts to introduce gratitude into the workplace result in heartfelt revelations or acts of generosity. There are many reasons why gratitude initiatives might not go over well.

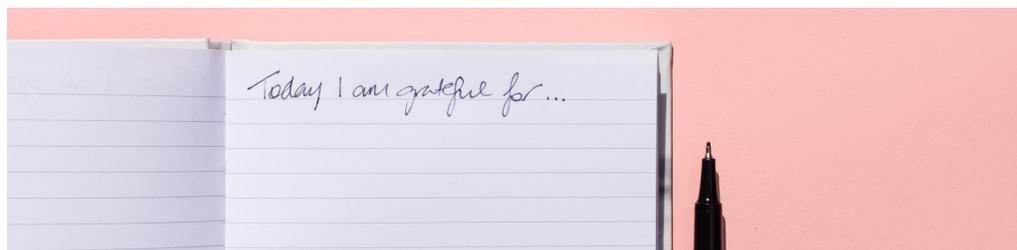
As Steve Foran suggested, they may come off as insincere, a token nod to employee well-being that can be advertised in corporate brochures. Some people may be wary of expressing gratitude and acknowledging their debt to others, seeing it as a sign of weakness. Even if the program is generally well-received, some employees could feel left out if they rarely receive gratitude or recognition. And of course, in the busy modern workplace, programs to foster gratitude and appreciation could feel like one more thing that employees don't have time for. But workplace leaders and researchers have identified some strategies for avoiding these pitfalls and reaping the benefits of a more grateful workplace. Here are four of their best tips:

1. GRATITUDE IS ABOUT THE WHOLE PERSON. According to author and consultant Mike Robbins, some gratitude initiatives fail to do anything new: They simply repurpose recognition programs, which have existed for a long time. Recognition rewards performance and achievement – what you accomplish as a worker – whereas appreciation acknowledges your inherent worth as a person, he says. It's the difference between celebrating record-breaking sales vs. applauding a caring and helpful spirit.

2. GRATITUDE ISN'T ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL. Another common pitfall when companies introduce gratitude is assuming that everyone wants to be appreciated in the same way. Each person's language of appreciation is different, and we risk miscommunication if we assume everyone likes to receive a card, a coffee, or public praise. Stephanie Pollack has compiled dozens of different gratitude practices to try at work, from surprise care packages to appreciation badges to a celebration calendar.

3. GRATITUDE MUST BE EMBRACED BY LEADERS. In a culture that prizes busyness and hard-driving achievement, people can feel guilty and self-indulgent taking the time to meditate at work or keep a gratitude journal. Getting leaders to participate communicates that gratitude and well-being are important. At the same time, though, gratitude isn't something you can force. Gratitude will really take hold when it's also embraced from the bottom-up, when employees take the initiative.

4. GRATITUDE HAS TO BE PART OF THE CULTURE. For Ryan Fehr, one of the keys to a successful program is consistency. For example, adding a short gratitude practice to staff meetings or infusing internal communications with gratitude keep it top-of-mind. Employee awards once a year won't cut it, he says. “Ultimately, it's about creating an organizational culture around gratitude,” says Fehr. “Organizations need to, as a baseline, treat their employees well, and then on top of that the organization also needs to develop programs that help them see all of these positives.”



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