

Giving Praise

Recognizing Good Work



Even small gestures of praise have benefits.

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Many of us are used to looking out for things that are going wrong. After all, if something's wrong, it needs to be fixed before it damages productivity, or affects the bottom line.

But do you actively look out for things that are going right? And how often do you show your appreciation for people who are performing well, even if you're not their manager?

Many people don't give enough praise in the workplace. However, almost everyone – including team members, colleagues, customers, suppliers and your boss – loves to get sincere recognition for a job well done.

In this article, we'll look at how you can best give this recognition.

Why Give Praise?

There are many reasons why you should regularly give praise.

First, people who feel appreciated and respected are more motivated than those who think their efforts go unnoticed. They're more engaged in the work they do, and they're more committed to their teams and organizations, because they know that they're making a real difference. This is especially important if you're working in an organization where budgets are tight, and where you can't afford to reward your people with raises or bonuses.

Sincere praise also helps you develop good work relationships with colleagues. These same colleagues are often very willing to return that feeling of goodwill: this means that they're more likely to lend a helping hand or share some useful information when you need it.

An interesting aspect about praise is the chemical reaction it causes in us. **Research** shows that when we hear something we like, a burst of dopamine is released in our brains. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter, and it's associated with feelings of joy, pride, satisfaction, and well-being.

When you praise someone else, not only does that person feel great, but it leads them to want to experience that same feeling again. Giving praise cements good working habits and behavior, both chemically and intellectually.

Note:

While giving praise is an essential part of developing good work relationships, it's important not to praise others just to get something in return. Enjoy giving praise, and enjoy its positive effect on the people around you!

Obstacles with Praise

Some people find it very difficult to give compliments. For instance, if they were raised in an environment where giving praise wasn't the norm, it might not occur to them to praise people. Other people feel uncomfortable giving praise, because they have low self-esteem, or because it makes them feel embarrassed.

If you don't feel comfortable giving praise, it's important to think about why it's difficult for you. Once you've discovered the root of the problem, you can start taking steps to overcome it.

If you're simply not used to giving others praise, set a goal to recognize someone's good work at least once each day. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to show this appreciation.

You can also adjust your work habits so that you're in a better position to touch base with colleagues and team members. Practice **management by walking around**, or start eating lunch in the break room instead of at your desk. Remember that you don't have to be face-to-face with someone to praise good work; you can send an email, call the person, or even praise her hard work to others when the person isn't around.

How to Give Memorable Praise

While giving praise is important, it's equally important not to go over the top. If you praise others too often, it will lessen the impact of your message and make others question your integrity. Follow these strategies to give memorable and sincere praise.

1. Be Specific

Most of us have heard comments like "Nice job!" or "Well done on that report!" While this type of general praise has its place and is definitely better than nothing, you'll make more of an impact if you're more specific.

For instance, you could say, "Your thoroughness on that report made my day go more smoothly; thank you." When you tell the other person what he did well and how it had a positive effect, it will make your message memorable and relevant.

2. Praise Often

The more you praise others sincerely, the quicker they'll learn what's important to you. This is especially relevant if you're in a management role and you're trying to shape the behavior and work ethic of a new team.

Use the **Losada Ratio** to balance your praise and constructive feedback; this ratio states that people perform best when they experience at least three positive interactions to every one negative interaction. Try to better this 3:1 ratio with everyone on your team. This theory also ties into the **Broaden and Build Theory**, which says that the more positive emotions you can encourage in other people, the more flexible and creative they'll become.

3. Show as Well as Tell

Praise doesn't always have to come in the form of a verbal or written compliment. You can show your appreciation and respect to others in a variety of ways.

For instance, asking a team member to mentor a new employee shows that you value her work ethic and character. Or, asking a colleague to lead a team that you're putting together shows that you respect his expertise and leadership abilities. Mix verbal praise with actions that show your appreciation and respect.

4. Praise Appropriately

Everyone on your team and in your organization has a different personality, and each person is likely to have different motivations. Some people crave the limelight, and they love being praised publicly. Others would prefer a quiet "thank you" in private.

This is why it's important to figure out the best form of praise for each person. Before you offer public praise to anyone, ask yourself whether this is something the person would truly want. You can use **McClelland's Human Motivation Theory** to structure your feedback so that it's meaningful for each person.

5. Spread Your Praise

Your most talented or hardworking team members likely get praised all the time (this might be one reason why they perform so well). However, you should try to include team members who get less recognition; it might be that a little appreciation is all that they need to flourish.

Tip:

It's best not to praise someone and then ask for a favor in the same conversation. The other person might suspect that the praise is meaningless, and that you're simply "buttering them up."

Giving Praise in Different Cultures

Keep in mind that giving praise publicly or regularly might be frowned upon in some cultures.

For instance, if you're **managing in the United States**, then giving praise is an important part of building good working relationships with a team. However, if you're **managing in Germany**, then you could lose trust with your team by giving too much praise.

If you're managing people from different backgrounds, make sure that you're aware of cultural norms, and be sensitive to these preferences. (You can better understand specific differences between cultures with our articles on **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions** and **The Seven Dimensions of Culture**.)

Key Points

Praise is an essential part of keeping people motivated and engaged in their work, and it's also good for building good working relationships with team members, customers, and colleagues. Follow these tips to provide meaningful praise.

1. Be specific.
2. Praise often.
3. Show as well as tell.
4. Praise appropriately.
5. Spread your praise.

In some cultures, praise can embarrass people or even cause them to look at you with mistrust. In these situations, it's important to be sensitive in the way that you give praise.