

## IN SEARCH OF HONOR

### Gee, Thanks!

By Adele B. Lynn

Finally, the discovery every manager has been waiting for, a guaranteed way to increase productivity, build trust, raise self esteem and improve retention of employees!

Something this valuable must be very difficult to do, or quite expensive, or consume inordinate amounts of time, or surely it would abound in the workplace. Paradoxically, it is none of these things. It is very easy to do. It is absolutely free. It takes only a moment, yet it is perceived to be quite rare.

In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor reported in 1995 that 46 percent of people who quit their jobs did so because they felt unappreciated. In a survey conducted by Lynn Learning Labs, we found that 88% of employees said they do not feel appreciated by their supervisors and managers. Why do we as leaders ignore the power of such a simple tool? Because we let our rational minds get in the way. For example, has this rational thought ever crossed your mind? "Why should we have to thank people for doing their job? That's what we pay people for -- to do their jobs. Isn't that enough?"

For a few, perhaps it is enough, but for a significant number of people, well - placed genuine gratitude influences attitude by acknowledging his effort, attitude, skill, or experience.

Consider for a moment the rote thank you we sometimes receive at the end of the checkout line or at the fast-food restaurant. "Thank you, have a nice day" is delivered without eye contact to some nondescript person in a monotone voice aimed at fulfilling a job requirement and getting you out of the way so the next customer can be served. There is no gratitude attached to this message, nothing heartfelt.

In contrast, I was at the grocery store with a rather large order. Every available clerk was busy, and the lines snaked halfway to the back of the store. Not out of the goodness of my heart, but rather due to my impatience, I bagged the groceries while the clerk was still checking my order. After everything was bagged, the clerk turned to me, looked me in the eye, and said very warmly, "Thanks, I really appreciate you bagging for me." Now, maybe I'm not very smart, and maybe I was being manipulated, but I'd bag for her anytime. I felt appreciated.

Through many workshops that I've done titled "The Thank You Connection," I've found that my own reaction is typical. Most people have told me that when people or leaders say thank you, the most typical response was that people wanted to do more. During my workshops, I have people list on flip charts how they feel when someone in the workplace sincerely says thank you, and in fact, the three categories of responses that I get are:

- 1) It makes people want to do more (increases productivity).

- 2) It makes people feel good about themselves (increases self-esteem).
- 3) It makes people feel good about the person delivering the thank you (improves relationships).

Leaders must see their role as influencing attitudes. Gratitude serves that purpose. To understand and deliver a message of gratitude, the acknowledger must *feel* grateful. Therefore, a leader who wants to express gratitude must *think* about what people are doing right. Leaders sometimes have trouble getting the mindset right. Once the mindset is right, the gratitude easily follows.

Remember, we're talking simple here. Don't over-complicate this genuine act of gratitude. All that it requires is:

- \*A sincere heart on the part of the leader...
- \*A simple specific statement of thanks to a specific person...
- \*Explaining why you are grateful...
- \*Delivered personally...
- \*Soon after the event...
- \*Never mixed with a word of criticism or sarcasm...
- \*Reinforced or linked back to values or expectations ...
- \*And delivered with 'touch': eye contact; warm, sincere voice; and a caring heart.

However, we must keep in mind that the true motive behind gratitude is simply to say "thank you." If this motive becomes corrupted, and gratitude is used simply for gain, then the leader is dishonest and his efforts will likely backfire.

### **Spirit Killers and Soul Suckers**

#### **Gratitude for Gain**

Beware. If the leader uses gratitude for gain or manipulation, people will see through her. We repeat: The sole purpose of gratitude is to honor the other person by acknowledging his effort, attitude, skill, or experience. Yes, we believe there are payoffs from expressing gratitude, but if the leader does this with the payoff in mind rather than the real purpose, the results will be corrupted. People will see it as merely a manipulation tool and will not respond in the same way.

#### **Using Dollars to Measure Gratitude**

We also have more to gain if we separate gratitude from monetary rewards. Once we say thank you and here is \$100 for your effort, then we begin to judge the effort. It could leave people thinking, "Well, if it was that good, why is it worth only \$100, why not \$200."

#### **Blind Gratitude**

In addition to pairing gratitude and monetary reward, another mistake can kill the good intentions of gratitude. Sometimes leaders don't see clearly. Perhaps the leader sees that Paolo has done a great job on a project and tells him so. Unfortunately, he hasn't

seen Phillip's efforts to make the project a success. In his efforts to recognize Paolo, the leader could have made Phillip feel hurt or unappreciated.

**Redundant Gratitude**

Not again please. This leader thanks everyone for everything every minute of the day. The beauty of the word 'thank you' is distorted due to overuse.

**Insincere Gratitude**

Don't say thank you if you don't mean it. Employees will know instantly if you are insincere. It's best not to say anything. It will only ruin your credibility if you say things you don't mean.

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