

After the Teambuilding

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Tips for Maximizing Training and Other Change Efforts

Damned if You Do, Damned if you Don't;

Contents

<i>Damned If You Don't..</i>	1
<i>Damned If You Do...</i>	1
<i>Step One</i>	2
<i>What Is Acknowledgment?</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgment 101</i>	3
<i>What To Expect?</i>	4
<i>Keeping It In Existence</i>	4
<i>Personal Organizers</i>	4

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You worked lte last night, getting an ad layout ready for one of the partners in your agency to show to a client in the morning. You tried all the elements in various sizes and finally, after many hours, produced an elegant, high-impact ad that you are very proud of.

This morning when you arrived there was no thank-you note on your desk, no message on your voice-mail. You shrugged your shoulders. "Well, I hope the client likes it."

Later in the day, the partner returns to the office. "How did the client meeting go?" you casually inquire. "Oh, fine," is the response.

The rest of the conversation occurs in your head. "This is the last time I stay that late to do a last-minute request. They can just give me enough notice next time. I have other things to do with my time," and so on.

Damned If You Don't...

If you were to take all of the tools, tips and techniques that are promoted in business change efforts today, and rate them in terms of how difficult they are to effectively incorporate, acknowledgment would be very close to the top of the list.

People in the workplace have a big appetite for receiving acknowledgment but are, at the same time, curiously hesitant to give it. "Why should I?" is a question often asked. "Why should I take the time to acknowledge people for doing a good job when that is what I pay them for?" managers are heard saying. "What difference does it make if I acknowledge my co-worker? They don't acknowledge me," we hear from the rank and file. Clearly, it looks different depending on whether you are the giver or the receiver.

It makes a big difference to acknowledge people on a regular basis.

- **It builds trust.** A heart-felt acknowledgment takes something from both parties. The person being acknowledged must "let it in" and the person acknowledging must be paying close attention to the listener. These two activities build trust.
- **The individual feels important.** They feel like an important part of the company, not just a cog in the proverbial wheel.
- **It reduces divisiveness.** Regular acknowledgment creates an environment which is less internally competitive. People go to bat for each other: gossip is reduced.
- **It builds team.** Workers and managers alike, when focusing on what works about people, are proud to be associated with them.
- **It doesn't cost anything.** Really, aside from a few seconds a few times a day, it doesn't have to cost anything.

Damned If You Do..

"Putting" acknowledgment into your department and expecting it to fix everything would leave you disappointed. Many companies have done just that by implementing extensive acknowledgment programs that were designed to make the workers feel appreciated. I attended an acknowledgment ceremony recently in a client company and while I was listening to the speeches and presentations I thought, "Now, *this* is really great!" Then I overheard the people behind me (one with an award) saying, "I hate these things. It's a lot of time wasted on something nobody cares about!"

This incident and others like it got me thinking. If people say they want acknowledgment

but reject this type of ceremony as insincere, how does a manager C let alone a coworker C acknowledge a person so that it fulfills on their goal of taking care of the staff?

Partly at issue is that companies try to institutionalize something that is more powerful at a personal level. Partly, the issue is that many union rules expressly forbid any sort of tangible acknowledgment on an individual basis so institutionalizing has its appeal.

Add to that the fact that acknowledgment programs cost lots of money, so if

It will seem peculiar if you don't take these things into account before you embark on an acknowledgment path. Make

But it is hard to know them from friends, they are so obsequious and full of protestations; for a wolf resembles a dog, so doth a flatterer resemble a friend.

Raleigh, Sir Walter, Instructions to His Son and to Posterity, (1632)

One should use praise to recognize what one is not.

Canetti, Elias, The Secret Heart Of The Clock: Notes, Aphorisms, Fragments, (1991).

they aren't getting it done, they should be eliminated C but they can't be eliminated without something to replace them.

Clearly, this isn't as simple as designing a standard program and inserting it into your current business.

It would be impossible to effectively discuss acknowledgment at the level of the conglomerate in a newsletter of this scope, so here we will focus on a single department, yours, and the scope of a single person, either manager or worker.

Step One

Assess and prepare the environment in much the same way you would season wood before working with it. Serious issues that should be handled first will be a part of that environment. Have you alienated anyone or damaged your position in the company? Don't gloss over that or acknowledgment will sound unctuous. ("He demotes me without explanation and now he is telling me how great I am. I don't believe it!")

Is your organization a highly regulated one in which the boss make all the decisions, even the low-level ones? ("She won't let me decide on how to arrange my office and now she is buttering me up!")

a conscious decision to handle these issues if you want people to listen to you when you are acknowledging them. If you have a particularly difficult environment, *get a coach!*

What Is Acknowledgment?

We blithely rattle off the word acknowledgment and assume everyone knows what we are talking about. I suggest there are some finer distinctions that might be useful to discuss.

Thanks C Thanking someone for an action dignifies the action. The implication in thanking someone is that they had the freedom of choosing to take the action or not. When a supervisor thanks an employee for a deed (even if it is part of the job), it dignifies that deed and dignifies the doer.

Praise C Praise is usually reserved for something exceptionally well done. Praise is an acknowledgment of someone's skill or the attention paid to a job or assignment.

Appreciation C Even though it can be applied to both, appreciation begins to focus on the person, not the job. Even if the recipient fails to produce a result, there is still something about them to appreciate. Perhaps their determination, their creativity or their cheerfulness while working.

Credit C You have heard the phrase, "What goes around, comes around." Credit is like that. If you start giving people credit for work or contributions, it will come back to you. Maybe not to-

day or tomorrow, but soon.

Often people feel that their boss or someone else "takes" credit for their work. Sometimes this is because the boss explicitly claims all the credit, but more often than not, it is a sin of omission. Since every project has many people who contributed, how do you make sure everyone gets their due? Giving due credit does not mean reading a list as if you were accepting an Academy Award. It may be as simple as saying who had the original idea or who on the staff was of particular help.

Each one of these types of acknowledgment has its own place and purpose. Think of a time when you used each one. If you can't think of a time this week that you used at least three of them, then you definitely aren't using them enough. Some of these distinctions are very fine and may not be important all the time. However, you should be aware of all of them and able to use them at will.

When you think about what is missing in your department, workgroup or company, focus on one or two of these categories and work on them first.

Let's look for a moment, at *flattery*. Flattery has a strangely chameleon-like quality as it takes on the color and meaning attached to it by the intent. In the context of friendship ("nice tie" or "you have the nicest handwriting") flattery is harmless and unimportant. In a business context it is almost never appropriate and will almost always be seen as self serving, obsequious and intended to manipulate. Flatterers attempt to use the recipient's vanity to gain an advantage. As an organization begins to fulfill on its commitment to acknowledge people adequately, flattery may seep in as a seemingly easy way to get it done.

Telling the difference between flattery and genuine acknowledgment is the key. Acknowledgment is oriented around the recipient and is given with

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no self-serving motive. All the giver gets out of acknowledgment is the satisfaction of doing it, a better relationship with others and a more congenial workplace.

Flattery, on the other hand, is completely oriented around the giver and is all about what is in it for them personally.

Acknowledgment 101

To get you started, here are some tips. They can be used in almost every environment and will take some of the mystery out of acknowledgment.

1) **Be authentic.** Praising for something poorly done, or something that was easy to do is a mistake. It can come back to haunt you, especially if you have to discipline the recipient later.

2) **Be specific.** Vague generalities always seem vacuous. Even if you are acknowledging someone for a general willingness to work hard without complaint, say *that*.

How can acknowledgment fit into your firm? Do you need coaching? Call (609) 921-3139 to schedule 2 hour of free personalized coaching.

Don't just tell someone they are "great."

After you have established acknowledgment as the norm, "You're great!" may be fine periodically, but don't slip into generalizing as a habit.

3) **Tell the truth.** This might seem redundant since I have already advised you to be authentic, but it *is* different. Acknowledging someone gives you the opportunity to let them know that you depend on them, you need them. This can feel risky so you might attempt to acknowledge others without being vulnerable yourself. It won't work. *This is personal. Get personal.* Don't withhold your generosity and your vulnerability here. If you couldn't have done it without them, tell them. Tell them that you would have been in trouble had they not bailed you out. Tell them that their ideas are always great fodder for the departmental work.

4) **Ask them what they want to be acknowledged for.** As a sales manager, I always liked to start a performance review by acknowledging the individuals for some accomplishment they had achieved

Back of any achievement is a proud spouse and a surprised mother-in-law. Brooks Hays, New York Herald Tribune, Dec. 2, 1961

since their last review. I managed a salesperson I didn't like for a while and my view of her was so colored by my dislike of her that I couldn't think of anything to acknowledge her for. I asked her what she was proud of in the past six months. She proceeded to tell me some things that I could genuinely say were good accomplishments and could therefore start with acknowledging her.

Asking employees or co-workers what they want to be acknowledged for is a great thing to do at the end of a project or project phase. It is a wonderful way to complete that stage as it allows people both to be acknowledged and to be responsible for what they want in the way of acknowledgment.

A corollary of this is, *ask for what you want.* No one can see everything. There are hundreds of things that take people's attention away. Managers often really don't know what you did on a project. Co-workers often don't notice that you stay late. There are 5.2 billion different perspectives on the planet. Give them a break and the benefit of the doubt. Ask for the acknowledgment that you want.

5) **Ask, repeat and embellish.** After you ask someone to tell you what they want to be acknowledged for, repeat what they said, don't try to say it differently. You won't be able to find words that work better than what they said. After you have used their words, *then* embellish.

e.g., Thank you for (*repeat*) "staying every night last week until 8 PM so this project could finish on time." (*embellish*) I also want to acknowledge you for doing it without complaining. And for mak-

ing it work for your family."

Remember, only say what is true and authentic. Don't acknowledge someone for not being a complainer if they *are* a complainer.

6) **Are you acknowledging the person or the job?** A thorough acknowledgment consists of both parts but it is not necessary to do both all the time. It *is* important to be aware of *which* you are doing, because both need to be done frequently. Focusing on one of them all the time can lead to your staff wondering whether you are avoiding something.

7) **Don't worry about its backfiring.** Years ago, my husband had reservations about acknowledging his staff. He said he was concerned that they would throw it in his face when performance review (and raise) time came around. He thought they would say, "you said I am doing such a good job, so put your money where your mouth is."

If acknowledgment backfires, you are doling it out in too-small portions. Be generous with acknowledgment on a regular basis and your staff won't feel that they have to capitalize on every small piece of praise to get their due.

8) **Even when you are correcting people, acknowledge them.** If you have to discipline a worker or correct a mistake, there is no reason you have to let go of acknowledging them. Some examples of this are:

- "It surprises me that someone so dependable made this type of mistake. Is there anything you want to say about it?"
- "I hate disciplining someone in my department that I value so much, but this is against the policy. Should I have any concern that this might happen again?"
- "I have always seen you as so open minded, why did you do X?"
- "You got it right up to this point, great job. Now, what had you make this mistake?"

9) **Tell others about your staff.** The grapevine is the most effective communications vehicle in any organization. If you speak highly of your staff in a managers meeting or at lunch, it will get back to your staff *fast*.

What To Expect?

Frankly, it may take a little time. You may not see a miraculous turnaround in the team spirit or the suspicious nature of everyone over night, but if you persist in acknowledging people you will see a change over time.

"Nothing is so common-place as to wish to be remarkable."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., *"The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table"* 1858)

People are hungry to have their contribution noticed. They want to know that what they do makes a difference. You can assure them that it does. You can make sure that each person on your team, whether you are the team leader or a team member, is clear that they are appreciated. A side benefit is that you will feel wonderful. If you spend your time talking about what is great about people, even when you are correcting them or disciplining them, your whole environment will be oriented around the best in people rather than the worst.

It might take longer with some of your staff. Someone just may not be able to do well in your department or work group. Some people have troubles that you won't be able to deal with. This is unfortunate, but don't let that discourage you from focusing on what works about people rather than what doesn't.

Keeping It In Existence

It isn't enough to start acknowledging people. You have to follow through or it rings hollow. But with any new habit, one needs reminders to avoid backsliding. Transforming acknowledgment from a tool to a way of life takes:

- committing to it
- making a plan
- keeping it in existence
- processing feedback

Remembering to acknowledge people is not difficult after you have gotten some positive feedback, like seeing a worker

smiling after a meeting with you or a cheery hello from someone usually morose. But until that happens, you may need other means to remind you.

This can be anything from a middle-of-the-day checklist to a computer reminder.

The reminder will quickly fade into the background unless you heed it *every* time. Even so, you may find that you don't see that post-it note on your computer after a while and need to come up with another reminder method. Make no mistake, though, it is important to have the reminders. Don't leave something this important to your memory until it is part of regular daily business!

Acknowledgment well done could make the difference between a work environment that people resent and one that they enjoy coming to every day. And you, one person, can make an impact in that if you try. I promise!

Bonus Section

Using Your Calendar

Every year around this time, people have to make a choice that will stay with them for a whole year: what kind of calendar they will use. If you have settled on one that works well for you no matter how heavy or light your schedule is, then congratulations!

But I have discovered both from personal experience and from working with many clients on managing their time, that having too much extra space or not enough in a calendar is unworkable and annoying. Some simply don't want to carry any more than they have to and others can't stand being crowded by the size of the page. Here are a few tips to make your life easier as it pertains to using your calendar.

At the beginning of the year, buy three different types of calendars. (My choices: one by DayTimer which shows billable hours in 2 hour increments and a week at a glance in a 5" x 8" size. The second shows a week at a time in the pocket sized format by Day Runner and the third, by Southworth shows two weeks at a glance, and is also pocket sized.) It took

me a few years to figure out the variety I needed to buy so give yourself some time to settle on the different sizes that work for you.

As my schedule gets busier and lighter during the year, I switch calendars (it doesn't take *that* long). When I can't write everything in the space allotted, I move up in size, and when I have a lot of excess space on the page, like months of whole-day meetings, I move down in size.

Hints:

- **Keep your whole calendar in one place.** Keeping a home and work calendar, or one in your purse and one on your desk is deadly. Having *one and only one* will help keep you sane.
- **Use a calendar that *you* like.** Don't go along with others or use the kind the boss uses. Often, those I coach in time management want to use the kind I use, but I discourage that as what works for me might not be right for them.
- **Write it all down in your calendar.** Don't waste energy trying to remember where or when your meetings are. That is what calendars are for.
- **Use your calendar for a to-do list.** Use your calendar as a to-do list location if it has a place to do that. If you have a long to-do list or a complicated one, keep it separately and use your calendar for your appointments only.
- **Look at it.** It won't make any difference if you don't check it before you make appointments!

Once you have a calendar that works for you in place, other issues might surface. You may find that you really do over-book yourself, you really do have to say "No", at times, and that your family does have a legitimate complaint. Those are separate issues for another newsletter and shouldn't be confused with poor time management.

Time management systems should grow and change as your needs do. Designing your system will put you back in charge of your time and your life and wouldn't that be a relief!

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