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Engage Your People By Being Grateful

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.
- William Arthur Ward

When we teach on the subject of employee motivation and engagement, we ask attendees to prioritize their professional motivators from the following list:

- Increased responsibility and challenge
- Money and benefits
- Flexibility and time off
- Camaraderie and fun
- Acknowledgment and respect
- Personal and professional development

While the order in which most prioritize these motivational values is deeply personal and dependent on many factors including your upbringing, prior work experiences, your gender, generation, current life stage and more, we have noticed that **“Acknowledgement and Respect” almost universally appears in each person’s top three priorities.**

Acknowledgement and respect are acts that communicate your appreciation for your people’s efforts and show them courtesy and kindness at work. This least expensive, yet impactful motivator, is often discounted as too “touchy/feely” or something to delegate to office administrators or others with “more time” to consider and execute acts of thanks.

But if employee motivation and engagement are of the utmost importance to the success of your firm, shouldn’t you be more consciously acknowledging the contributions of others? Here are eight simple ideas to get you started:

- 1. Encourage *all people connected with your organization, including partners, owners and clients, to treat all of your people, at all levels, with dignity and respect.*** Remind those who may engage in teasing, jabs, barbs or sarcasm that their comments may act as “de-motivators” and ask all team members to evaluate the motives of such comments to ensure they are always striving to be well-meaning and motivational.
- 2. “Catch” your people in the act of doing something positive and thank them for it as soon as you can after discovering their success.** If someone often does something well and right and you haven’t thanked them for it lately, stop the next time they do it and express gratitude for this instance and all of the others, too, so they know that you are aware of their long-standing contribution.
- 3. Send personal appreciation e-mails to people for a job well done or in honor of their birthday or anniversary with your firm.** If you are in a position of authority, you would be surprised at how much these communications mean to others.
- 4. Stop by someone’s cubicle or office to tell them what a great job they did on a project.** Making a physical effort and showing your appreciation in person can be impactful.
- 5. Send group communications acknowledging a team accomplishment or single out a team member for an achievement.**



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- 6. Send a hand-written note of appreciation.** This lost art of the “written hand” differentiates those of us still willing to take the time and we have seen these cherished notes pinned to cubicles or taped to walls years after they were sent by a superior, client or colleague.
- 7. Implement a “wow” note program in which anyone in your firm** can submit someone’s name and accomplishment for acknowledgement for consideration by management. Then, firm leaders can choose a few “wow” notes to read at every departmental or firm-wide meeting.
- 8. Provide your team members constructive, honest and private feedback** about their areas for improvement. You’ll show respect and commitment to the individual when you show your interest in helping them grow.

When you provide people acknowledgement for their contributions, be sure that it is specific and sincere. Generalizing, over-blowing or acknowledging people when they don’t deserve it will feel contrived and have a demoralizing effect.

And, if you are reading this and thinking, “I don’t have time to stop and thank others,” I hear you. If you don’t think you have the time, think about how much time you’ll save in recruiting and replacement costs if you calendar a reminder each Wednesday to thank someone on your team or within your client base for something they’ve done lately. Or, how much time you may gain because a more engaged work group will produce more.

Choose one idea and experiment with gratitude. You’ll be amazed at how much more engaged and grateful those you acknowledge will be!

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