

In Praise Of Praise

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Why do we spend so much on using money as a motivator when there is a free motivational tool available to us? Giving praise is one of the most powerful motivators you can use -- if you do it right. This article shows you how.

Content:

If you manage others, one of the most valuable tools you have in your kitbag is Praise. Along with its counterpart, Criticism, these two instruments can make a massive difference to how people feel. And how they feel can make an even bigger difference to how they work. Here are 5 ways to use Praise and Criticism in effective and productive ways.

1. Praise in Public, Criticise in Private. While public praise can make people feel 10 foot tall, public criticism will make them feel 10 inches small. What's more, the recipients of public condemnation will simmer a pot of revenge to be delivered at a moment just when you don't need it. Instead, always follow the advice of Catherine the Great of Russia: "I praise in public I criticize in private."

2. Reverse Your Criticism-Praise Ratio. When we don't think about it, we tend to do more criticizing of others than praising. That's because we take it for granted that people who work for us should perform "without any comment from us" and we believe that it's only when people don't perform that we should say something. As a result, criticism is what we do most of.

Jack Canfield discovered that the average schoolteacher delivers 460 negative comments a day as compared to just 60 positive ones. When Jack reversed the ratio in one school, by simply getting the teachers to praise the children when they did something worthwhile, the results were astonishing. Morale and behaviour went up. And stayed up. And everyone was happier.

3. Add Sunshine To The Shower. If you have to criticize someone because there is little to praise, soften the edges with encouragement. Goethe, the late 18th century philosopher, said that encouraging others after criticism has a much more powerful effect on people than just criticizing them alone. He compared the effect to sunshine after a shower. George Adams, the American newspaper magnate, said that anyone who encourages others has an effect on them that they can't begin to know. It has the power to change lives.

As the Oxford don William Ward said: "Flatter me and I may not believe you. Criticise me and I may not like you. Ignore me and I may not forgive you. Encourage me and I will never forget you."

4. Praise and Mean It. Praise alone can work wonders. However, it hits barren ground if the person on the receiving end doesn't believe it or finds it insincere. One of the most effective ways of delivering praise is not just to tell someone what we liked about what they did, but to tell them the effect it had on us.

In "Business as a Game", Albert Carr relates the story of a speech given by a chief executive. The man was not an accomplished speaker and knew it. Nevertheless, shortly after he had sat down, he was approached by one of his department managers. "Mr Rossen, that was a terrific speech. A great performance. Churchill couldn't have done better!" The chief replied amiably: "Thank you, Larry. Glad you liked it."

A few days later, another manager came up to the chief during lunch and said: "Mr Rossen, I've been thinking about what you said the other night. It's got me thinking about some changes we could make in our department. Would you mind if I sent you my thoughts?" "Not at all, Bill," said the chief. "I'm glad the speech got you thinking."

It's not difficult to work out which compliment mattered most.

5. Power-Praising. Richard Branson, chairman of multinational empire Virgin, says he has one simple way to motivate his staff: "I pick the best people I can and then I

praise, praise and praise them.â€•

There is no doubt that people are motivated by praise. It is after all one of the needs identified by Abraham Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs. We are motivated by the need for recognition by those who matter to us. Partly because of this, praise can be addictive. People look for it when they do good work and become de-motivated when it isnâ€™t forthcoming. Thatâ€™s also why the combination of praise and criticism together works so well. Make it a habit never to give praise without encouragement to do better, nor encouragement to do better without praise. Thatâ€™s why the Positive-Negative-Positive sandwich works so well.

One final point. When you give genuine, sincere, and well-meant praise, you raise your status in the eyes of others. Giving praise is so rare that we notice the people who do it to us.

There is nothing complicated about giving praise. It is one of the simplest and most powerful interpersonal skills around. All it takes is to notice what others are doing, take time out to speak to them, and with a little bit of kid psychology, simply tell them something that will make their day.

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