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Focus

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Why You Should Offer More Praise

When asked by researchers how well they do at giving praise, only 5% of leaders admit to doing a poor job. However, 40% of *followers* want their leaders to do a better job of acknowledging their contributions. Would you say there are a bunch of leaders who are in the dark?

These statistics are revealed in the just-published book *The Work of Leaders* by Julie Straw, et al, and are the result of a five-year study that included leaders from a broad range of perspectives.

- Contemporary experts included Seth Godin, Patrick Lencioni, John Maxwell, Larry Bossidy, Jim Collins and Max De Pree.
- Classic authors included Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis.

By the way, the book's authors used the phrase "in the dark," so please don't shoot the messenger!

I have been preaching this “praise” message for about 20 years now, and continue to do so because systematically acknowledging good work makes people work harder for the same pay. Employees also report higher levels of job satisfaction when they receive sincere feedback, so there’s less turnover in addition to higher productivity. “Feedback” should be specific, not just a general “good job” comment. For example, “Fred, I was impressed the way you worked on Saturday so the late sample delivery did not affect our Monday presentation.”

Also, when you deliver regular praise the occasional criticism is more readily accepted. There’s actually a rule here (imagine that!) which states: As long as positive interactions are at least three times more frequent than negative interactions, criticism won’t dispirit the recipient because it is viewed as a normal part of feedback.

In my consulting experience, most leaders ruefully admit that they can do a better job with praise. I think we often don’t look for things to praise because we’re genetically inclined to be on the alert for threats and problems. But that’s no excuse, and I offer some tips you may find helpful.

- Put a gold dollar coin in your pocket everyday with the expectation of giving it to someone who did exceptional work, be it a restaurant server or your HR manager. I’ve found doing this predisposes me to subconsciously be on the alert for a praiseworthy moment.
- Write a short message on a small sticky note and place it when the recipient will discover it.
- Send a note or letter to the employee’s home.
- Make an out of the blue comment like, “Hey, I was just thinking last night how much work you’ve been doing on this. Thanks.” [from *Work of Leaders*]

Remember, sincerity matters more than the delivery method. People recognize an authentic compliment, and also a phony one. Be yourself, stay in your own skin, and be genuine.

Tom Wagner

President, Wagner Consulting Group, Inc.



About the photo:

It's always good to have a Plan B. If Tristan decides not to take over Wagner Consulting Group,
he has real potential to be a server at The White House.

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