

An Attitude of Gratitude



According to psychologists and other researchers, our minds are wired to focus on the negative as a survival instinct. It was important through the years to avoid dangers such as a saber-tooth tiger or poison berries. Now, it keeps us from things, such as oncoming traffic and rotten food, and it leads us to prepare for storms. But, that default can keep us from seeing good around us, including appreciating our family, friends, employees or teammates.

Gratitude is an appreciation of what is valuable or meaningful. And, we can train our brains to look for the good and be grateful. Studies show that people with higher levels of gratitude:

- Are able to reach more of their goals
- Have improved health, including stronger immune systems, decreased blood pressure, better sleep and more energy
- Are better able to support others
- Show greater optimism, are more likable and have a higher emotional intelligence
- Have decreased stress and anxiety
- Tend to have an improved sense of self-care, with a greater likelihood to exercise

As a leader, you can model an attitude of gratitude at the office for your teammates and employees. Showing gratitude or appreciation at work is important, especially when that appreciation comes from leaders:

- A study by Glassdoor found 80 percent of employees said they're willing to work harder for a boss who appreciates them than for one who does not.
- The same study found 70 percent said they would feel better about themselves and their efforts if their boss thanked them regularly.

Receiving gratitude from leaders is a positive thing for employees. However, in research done by Julie Winkle Giuliani, a best-selling author and one of *Inc.* magazine's top 100 leadership speakers, shows that:

- 81 percent of employees say they seldom or never received public praise from their boss
- 76 percent said they seldom or never received written thanks from their boss
- 58 percent said they rarely or never received praise of any kind

Robert Emmons, a psychology professor and leading researcher on gratitude, said, "Most of our waking hours are spent on the job, and gratitude, in all its forms, is a basic human requirement. So when you put these factors together, it is essential to both give and receive thanks at work."

Showing gratitude to your employees

How can you show gratitude to your employees? It's important to figure out how your employees would like to be shown gratitude. In his book *5 Languages of Appreciation at Work*, best-selling author and psychologist Dr. Paul White and his co-author Gary Chapman say gratitude should be:

- **Individualized and personal:** A group email saying “good job team” doesn't mean as much as saying, “Jeff, thank you for staying late all last week to make sure the project was done,” or “Stephanie, I appreciate how you jumped in to help create the process flows on the fly.”
- **Communicated regularly:** Yearly reviews or even monthly are not enough. People need consistent feedback to know they're valued.
- **Given in a way that's meaningful to the person receiving it:** Find out how your employees feel most appreciated. It may be a literal high-five, a written note, a verbal “thank you” in front of the team, a small gift or you noticing they need help with something and jumping in.
- **Perceived as authentic:** The biggest complaint employees have about receiving gratitude or appreciation is that it doesn't seem authentic. No one wants a forced thank you — that's worse than no thank you at all and is a waste of time, according to Dr. White.



Gratitude has benefits for everyone

You may be wondering what's in it for you besides happier employees. When you show appreciation, you get a boost too. Showing gratitude increases the feeling of well-being of the giver **and** the receiver, according to a study conducted by the University of Texas, Austin, and published in the *Journal of Psychological Science*. They found the givers of appreciation overestimated how awkwardly the gesture would be received and underestimated how positive the recipient would be. So don't let your nerves get in the way of showing gratitude to your employees.

Sources: fastcompany.com*, health.harvard.edu*, deccanchronicle.com*, wbur.org*, consciouscompannymedia.com*, youearnedit.com*, appreciationatwork.com*

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