



SEPTEMBER 2015

Messenger

VOL. 13 NO. 6

Lose the 'Tude

People have debated for years whether attitude impacts behavior or behavior impacts attitude. Regardless of which comes first, changing one will eventually affect the other. If we help employees change their behavior, their attitudes will be changed over time as well. This shift is often gradual due, in part, to the need to overcome our own comfort zones and the habits we inevitably create. In order to help people make these changes, we must be prepared to make the highest level of impact.

John Noe says it well:

It is always easier not to prepare than to force yourself through the rigors of preparation. When I decided to begin running long distances, I discovered that getting started is the toughest part. It is always easier to roll over and go back to sleep, especially before the sun comes up or on a Saturday, than it is to rise and go out into the freezing cold and begin your long run. The greatest enemy of preparation is procrastination (Noe, J., *Peak Performance Principles for High Achievers*, 1984, Berkley, p. 79).

You can help employees change by providing a series of action steps and by giving praise for forward progress.

Structure the changes in a series of steps

Remember that we desire lasting changes, not just temporary changes that disappear after a few weeks. To achieve this, we must help employees anchor the changes in a new mental state. Such

anchoring of a new mental habit requires time and patience. Usually it is achieved only after a considerable number of failures. Even then we have no guarantee the change in the other person will be permanent. The employee can always choose his or her response to any given situation and return to his or her former habits.

In his book, *Strengthening Your Grip*, Charles Swindoll writes:

Words can never adequately convey the incredible impact of our attitude toward life. The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it. I believe the single most significant decision I can make on a day-to-day basis is my choice of attitude. It is more important than my past, my education, my bankroll, my successes or failures, fame or pain, what other people think of me or say about me, my circumstances, or my position. Attitude keeps me going or cripples my progress (Swindoll, C., *Strengthening Your Grip*, p. 4).

Praise is free, but not cheap

Praise costs us nothing but time and initiative. Yet, when sincerely and appropriately used, it can be one of the most appreciated and significant means of promoting and reinforcing change in others.

There is nothing we cannot live down, rise above, and overcome.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919)

Poet and journalist

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Praise encourages the worker to stay motivated

Praise reassures the employee that you noticed him. Many supervisors see the good that employees are doing, and they even tell others, but they forget to say anything to the employee.

Researchers in organizational behavior have long recognized the importance of what is called the Pygmalion Effect. The Pygmalion Effect refers to enhanced learning or performance that results from others having positive expectations of us. The fact that others believe we are capable of high levels of performance may lead us to perform at that level.

We must be careful not to call attention to bad performance without also saying something positive about the work an employee has done. When we constantly point out the bad without praising the good, the employee will think we did not notice the good she has done and is likely to become anchored in a present state of performance.

Many employees will do whatever it takes to be noticed. If they can gain attention no other way, workers may purposely act out so they will be noticed by leadership. If positive behavior gets them noticed, that is a wonderful thing. It is another reason for you to praise good work.

Next month we will look at the final benefits of how praising positive behavior will have lasting benefits on your employees.

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