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The Power of Praise

We've all heard the phrase that one bad apple can spoil the bunch. Not only does this apply to actual apples, but also to a group of people. Often, one person's negative attitude can affect an entire group of people to start feeling negative. On the other side, one person's positive behavior can influence others to be happier and more productive. This month, we're going to finish our look at how praising positive behavior will have lasting benefits on employees.

Praise is stimulating to self-esteem

When we give sincere praise, we are investing in the self-esteem of others by building them up psychologically. The building up of others in this way is one of the most helpful steps we can take in equipping our people for future positions of leadership. If we tear people down, we are reducing their chance for success as leaders.

In the book Feeling Good, David Burns discusses the importance of self-esteem. He writes:

Almost all negative emotional reactions inflict their damage only as a result of low self-esteem. A poor self-image is the magnifying glass that can transform a trivial mistake or an imperfection into an overwhelming symbol of personal defeat (Burns, D., Feeling Good 1980, p. 51).

Think for a moment about the parent who repeatedly tells her child that he worthless, not good at anything, not smart, or that she is embarrassed to be

seen with him. I would be horrified if I ever heard someone talking to a child that way! Unfortunately, we know that it happens. What do you suppose is the impact of these messages over time? What will they produce in the child?

Picture the power of the words in the life of a child. This child is wounded and hurting inside. He has a poor self-esteem and no personal confidence. He will look outside himself for validation from others. In doing this, the child may become involved with the wrong kind of friends. When people are hurting inside, they will gravitate toward people who give them time and respect. Sometimes this direction will defy the authorities.

This is true in the life of a worker as well. If we are constantly belittling an employee's work, it will not encourage them to perform better. However, if we give praise often and sincerely, it will enhance a worker's feeling of usefulness and value in the organization. They will usually continue the hard work in an effort to earn additional praise.

Praise reinforces the desired behavior

You may have heard you can attract more flies to honey than you can to vinegar. Praise reinforces

Words can destroy. What we call each other ultimately becomes what we think of each other, and it matters.

***Jeane J. Kirkpatrick
Diplomat***

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the direction of positive change by giving “honey” when employees are doing things right. This is a form of classic behavior modification. Give positive reinforcement when people are performing in a correct manner and negative reinforcement when they are performing in a negative or incorrect manner. Praising the good behavior allows the employee to keep score and know that things are going well. Let me state it again: **we must encourage the desired behavior as well as praise the person for the success he or she achieves along the road to change.**

Unless we build an individual’s self-esteem through praise, we will not anchor his or her new behavior, and the person will probably return to old habits. Remember, a clean pig is still a pig inside and will return to the mud hole. A change must take place within the individual if lasting change is to occur on the outside.

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