

Individual attention

Reduce turnover and encourage your staff with authentic appreciation.

By Paul White, Ph.D.



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Keeping your staff happy and feeling appreciated is one of the primary challenges facing small business owners. Not doing so leads to disgruntled team members, tension and conflict within the office, as well as increased errors, poor client service and more frequent staff turnover. Given the fast pace at which most successful financial advisors run, communicating “thanks” to their team members often gets lost in the busyness.

An additional challenge is understanding that not everyone feels encouraged in the same way. While financial reward, achievement and public recognition may drive *you* to action, these factors may not motivate your team. Many of the valuable staff members who help make financial practices successful are not primarily motivated by increased compensation, luxurious vacations or nice gifts. And many do not want public recognition in front of a large group for doing a good job.

Understanding that everyone feels valued in different ways will lead to a happier staff.

Importance of appreciation

Feeling appreciated by their supervisor and colleagues is shown to be critical to employees’ job satisfaction, but the evidence is clear that most Americans don’t feel valued by others at work:

- 64 percent of people who quit their jobs cite not feeling valued as one of the key reasons they leave, according to research conducted for the 2004 book “How Full Is Your Bucket?”

- 65 percent of workers in North America report they have received no recognition in the last 12 months for doing a good job, as uncovered in the same research.

- While 51 percent of managers report feeling they do a good job recognizing their staff, only 17 percent of staff members themselves report thinking their supervisor does a good job of recognizing them for good work, according to 2012 research conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management.

Recognition vs. appreciation

While nearly 90 percent of all businesses in the U.S. have implemented some form of employee recognition during the past decade, employee satisfaction has been declining at the same time. In fact, a recent Gallup poll indicated that up to 70 million U.S. employees are not engaged or actively committed to the mission of their company. And, when we talk with employees about their company's recognition program, the most common response we get is cynicism and sarcasm. Staff members report they rarely hear anything positive from their supervisor — they mainly receive correction or criticism.

Traditional employee recognition programs are not effective for a variety of reasons.

Most are based on actions that are:

- **Generic** — Everyone gets the same holiday card and gift card.
- **General** — “Thanks for all you do for the organization.”
- **Infrequent** — It might happen during a performance review.
- **Group-based** — “You all did a great job getting that proposal ready.”

Ultimately, employee recognition is viewed cynically because it is not viewed as authentic.

Fortunately, we do know how to help employees feel truly valued. We've identified four core conditions that are necessary for people to actually feel appreciated (rather than just receiving generic recognition). Team members feel appreciated when recognition is: communicated regularly, in the language and actions important to the recipient, delivered individually and is about them personally, and

when the appreciation is viewed as being genuine or authentic.

Languages of appreciation

Based on the concepts in Gary Chapman's bestselling book “The 5 Love Languages,” we found that employees need appreciation communicated in the way that is important to them.

1. Some people highly value **words of affirmation**, which can be a simple compliment: “Jill, thanks for getting the report completed and to me in time for the presentation.”
2. However, other individuals don't value verbal praise because to them, “words are cheap.” One office manager asks for **quality time** with a supervisor, saying, “John compliments everyone all the time, and that's fine. But, what I really need and want is just 15 minutes of his undivided attention without distractions, where I can talk to him about things that are important to me.”
3. A third language of appreciation is **acts of service**. As one team member shared, “It's not that encouraging to me to get a bunch of praise for all the work I've done while I continue to work long hours to finish a last-minute project. No one offers to help get the materials completed, even though it is supposed to be a ‘team project.’ A little help now and then can be quite encouraging.”
4. For some, a **small, tangible gift** can be quite meaningful. However, this is not the same as bonuses or additional compensation. Rather, it is a small indication that you're getting to know your team members, what they like, and what is important to them in their life out-

side of work. It can be something as small as one of their favorite cups of coffee, or a magazine about a hobby they enjoy (for example, gardening), or sports memorabilia for the college team they follow.

5. While it is critical that any physical touch is appropriate (not sexualized or unwanted), **physical touch** is actually common in many workplaces and cultures. High-fives when a project is completed, a fist bump given when a problem is solved, or a congratulatory handshake when an important sale is made are all examples of appropriate physical touch in work-based relationships.

Because it's critically important to know the language and actions that are important to each team member, we created the Motivating by Appreciation Inventory, which provides each person an individualized report identifying their most important language and the actions within that language that are meaningful to them. This allows employers (and their colleagues) to communicate encouragement in a way that “hits the mark.” This eliminates guessing, using a “shotgun” approach, and ultimately wasting time and energy by trying to communicate appreciation ineffectively.

Don't forget — your team members feel valued in different ways than you do. Make a plan to communicate your appreciation to them in the ways that are important to them, and you will begin to see a transformation occur. ■



For more information on how to communicate authentic appreciation in your workplace, visit www.appreciationatwork.com.