



## DO REMOTE EMPLOYEES WANT TO BE SHOWN APPRECIATION DIFFERENTLY THAN EMPLOYEES IN FACE-TO-FACE SETTINGS?

*Research reveals many remote employees value quality time with their colleagues more highly than those who work in face-to-face settings.*

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More and more American employees are working remotely. According to a Gallup poll, in 1995 only 9 percent of American workers telecommuted, but in 2015 the percentage of off-site workers increased to 37 percent. In 2016, 43 percent of American workers reported they spend at least part of their week working remotely.

The proportion of remote workers continues to increase every year. It has been estimated that 50 percent of the U.S. workforce has job responsibilities that are compatible with working off-site at least occasionally and between 80 and 90 percent of the U.S. workforce reports it *would like to* work remotely at least part-time. Not only are the growing numbers of employees working in locations separate from their colleagues and supervisor, but pure “virtual teams” across cities, states, and countries are multiplying, as well.

### **The Importance of Appreciation in the Workplace**

The Gallup organization conducted research with 1 million employees around the world (over a series of years), and found *communicating appreciation to employees* to be one of the core elements related to increasing employee engagement. The level of employee engagement within a workplace has been shown to be highly predictive of numerous positive benefits, including:

- Less absenteeism
- Reduced internal theft by employees
- Fewer on-the-job accidents

- Higher customer ratings
- Lower staff turnover
- Greater profitability
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Additionally, in a global study of more than 200,000 employees, the *most important factor* related to employees enjoying their job was that they felt appreciated.

Unfortunately, expressing appreciation is not commonplace. Some 65 percent of North Americans have reported they have not received *any* recognition for work well done in the last 12 months. A study by the John Templeton Foundation found that 60 percent of employees say they either “never” express gratitude at work or do so perhaps once a year. And while 51 percent of managers believe they do an adequate job of showing recognition for work well done, only 17 percent of the employees who work for them agree.

### **Employees Differ in How They Want to Be Shown Appreciation**

Not everyone likes to be shown appreciation in the same ways. While verbal compliments are commonly used, our research with more than 100,000 employees found that almost 50 percent of employees prefer *other ways* of being shown appreciation. Some employees like to get individual time with their supervisor, while others feel encouraged when they get to “hang out” with their co-workers. Another group truly appreciates some help when they are trying to finish a project in time for a deadline.

But when appreciation is *not* communicated in the ways desired by the recipient, frustration can result. We have found that identifying an individual’s preferred language of appreciation is key to “hit the mark” and not waste time and energy doing something not valued by the recipient. Determining what type of appreciation colleagues want can be discovered through having team members take an assessment to identify both their preferred language of appreciation, as well as the specific actions meaningful to them.

### **Appreciation and Remote Employees**

The fact that all employees desire to be appreciated for their work, combined with the reality that more employees are working remotely, creates a challenge that needs to be addressed:

#### ***How do you effectively communicate appreciation to your team members in the context of long-distance work relationships?***

For example, how do you spend “quality time” with a colleague who works in a different state, or perform some “act of service” for a team member in another country?

In response to this need, a version of the online *Motivating By Appreciation Inventory* was developed specifically for long-distance work relationships. The primary questions of the inventory remained generally the same, but the specific actions respondents could choose from

their primary language of appreciation were tailored to fit work relationships over distance. Here are some examples of action items:

- Use multiple formats for communicating—e-mail, texting, talking on the phone, and videoconferencing. (*Words of Affirmation*)
- Schedule a call occasionally just to chat and see how work-related tasks are going. (*Quality Time*)
- Agree to schedule a meeting or call when it is convenient for *them*, not according to *your* time zone. (*Act of Service*)

### **Differences in Appreciation Desired?**

We began to wonder if those individuals who were in long-distance work relationships desired to be shown appreciation in the same ways as employees who worked on-site. That is:

***Do employees who work remotely have different preferred languages of appreciation than those in the general workforce?***

To answer this question, we conducted a research study with more than 89,000 individuals who took two different versions of the *Motivating By Appreciation Inventory*: one for employees in long-distance work relationships and the general workplace version for employees who work in face-to-face settings.

The results of the two employee groups then were compared (the full research study and results can be found in *Strategic HR Review*, 2018).

### **How Do Remote Employees Like to Be Shown Appreciation?**

Generally, employees in long-distance work relationships are similar to those who work in face-to-face work settings in the overall patterns of how they prefer to be shown appreciation. Both groups preferred *Words of Affirmation* the most, *Quality Time* second most frequently, *Acts of Service* third, and *Tangible Gifts* the least. And the sequence is similar (but reversed) for their identified Least Valued language of appreciation.

But we found that employees in long-distance work relationships chose *Quality Time* significantly more often (35 percent) than workers on-site (25 percent). The majority of these switched from *Words of Affirmation* to *Quality Time* being their primary appreciation language (48 percent in general work settings to 38 percent for long-distance employees).

So it is important for supervisors and colleagues to keep in mind that many remote employees value *Quality Time* with their colleagues more highly than those who work in face-to-face settings. Conversely, receiving some type of verbal praise, while still important to remote workers, is desired less often than in general work settings.

How do you spend *Quality Time* over a long distance? A few of the types of *Quality Time* that remote employees report valuing include keeping connected through videoconferencing, including them in team meetings virtually, and setting up times to talk about non-work related topics.

From a practical perspective, the single most important lesson we have learned for effectively communicating appreciation to remote colleagues is that ***one must be more proactive*** than in face-to-face relationships. One of the biggest barriers to overcome in showing appreciation over a distance is ***the lack of opportunity for those short chance encounters*** that occur when colleagues work in the same location—coming into the office in the morning, getting something in the break room, walking through the hallway in the office, or sitting together in the conference room waiting for a meeting to start. All of these provide the occasion to be able to chat for a few minutes and “check in” to see how your colleague is doing. In long-distance work relationships, these events don’t occur and need to be more frequently planned.

Being valued by their supervisor and colleagues is important to those who work remotely, and communicating appreciation can be done effectively across long distance. Showing appreciation in the ways that are meaningful to remote team members does take some time and forethought—but the results are worth it!

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