

Two-Thirds of Workers Don't Feel Appreciated

Does your organization encourage a culture of gratitude?

Not in an obligatory (and fear-tinged) “In this economy you’d better be grateful just to have a job, buddy” way, but in an “I really appreciate my co-workers and the feeling is mutual” way. Chances are the answer is no. According to a recent Gallup poll, 65% of people say they don’t feel appreciated at work. And that feeling quickly leads to pervasive negativity, low morale and (worst of all) decreased productivity.

Author Liz Jazwiec says it doesn’t have to be this way. Companies can deliberately infuse their cultures, from top to bottom, with an “attitude of gratitude.” In fact, those who don’t put gratitude on a pedestal, especially in today’s high-stress work environments, are shooting themselves in the foot.

“Too many people leave work every day thinking, ‘My boss doesn’t appreciate me,’ ” says Jazwiec, author of *Eat That Cookie!: Make Workplace Positivity Pay Off...For Individuals, Teams and Organizations* (Fire Starter Publishing, 2009). “When you feel that your boss doesn’t fully value your work, you start to care a little less. You don’t provide the kind of service you would if you felt appreciated. You don’t make an effort to help your co-workers.

“And when the majority of the people in a workplace feel this way, the overall environment is hugely impacted,” she says. “Productivity decreases, turnover increases, and it can become very difficult to stay afloat, especially in a tough economy.”

Jazwiec stresses that workplace gratitude isn’t something that is passed only from the boss to the employee. To have a real impact on workplace positivity, employees should show it to one another and to their bosses. And leaders and employees should show it to their customers.

“It’s obvious when you are in a workplace where people value gratitude and graciousness,” Jazwiec says. “There is a really great vibe in those places. And when gratitude and graciousness are missing, it is equally evident. People in those environments seem to have a sense of entitlement. Co-workers who come into contact with them might say, ‘There is just no pleasing those people!’ Customers might say, ‘They just don’t care about me!’ Neither reaction is good for business.”

The great thing about infusing gratitude into the workplace is that it can come from anyone, regardless of position.

“If you are a leader, you can infuse gratitude from the top down, perhaps by making it a required standard of behavior for employees,” Jazwiec says. “And if you are an employee, you can start your own grass-roots gratitude movement by expressing gratitude yourself and encouraging your co-workers to do so as well. Everyone — and I

mean everyone — can show gratitude in a workplace and influence others to do so.”

Jazwiec offers these tips on how to hardwire workplace gratitude from the ground up:

Say thanks. When someone does something kind for you, whether it’s the boss, a co-worker, or a stranger, recognize it. A simple “thanks” will do. “You can’t expect people to appreciate you if you don’t receive their kindnesses and compliments with thankfulness,” Jazwiec says. “Sure, you might be skeptical if your boss goes to a leadership conference, and upon his return starts handing out compliments left and right. But just stop and think. Are those compliments making people happy? When you are recognized, does it give you even just the tiniest little twinge of happiness?”

“If so, then you’d better meet the gratitude your boss is showing with a little gratitude in return,” Jazwiec says. “Otherwise, he will start thinking that his recognition doesn’t really mean anything to anyone, and his exercise in gratitude will be short-lived. And leaders, give your employees a chance to jump on the gratitude bandwagon. It may take a couple of compliments from you before they realize what this new positivity movement is all about. You may get a few skeptical looks after the first few compliments, but eventually they will warm up to the idea and be thankful — there’s that word again — that you are making the effort.”

Adopt an “it’s the thought that counts” attitude. Consider this scenario: A new VP at a hospital wants to do something special for her hardworking, overworked staff. It’s decided that pizza will be provided for the entire hospital staff, rolling out over a Sunday, Monday and Tuesday to ensure that every person on every shift can take a pizza break. The pizza plan goes into effect and the VP who arranged everything walks around the departments expecting to be welcomed with open arms by an appreciative staff. Instead she finds that many of the teams taking care of patients are upset because they can’t leave their patients to go down to the cafeteria where the pizzas are located. Meanwhile (they complain), the business office and IT staffs are able to go to the cafeteria as they please.

“In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit that I was that VP,” Jazwiec says. “And I was devastated. I had tried so hard to get it right. Now, I did learn from that experience. I knew that the next time I should have the pizzas delivered directly to the units. But had I been someone with a different personality, I might have just decided never to order pizzas, or do anything else special ever again. My point is that sometimes you have to take into account the intentions of your boss or your coworkers. If it is clear that they meant for something to be a way of thanking you or helping you, don’t complain about how they missed the mark. Thank them for thinking of you and move on!”

Communicate openly and honestly. If it’s gratitude people need, they should tell someone! Often leaders or coworkers can be so tied up in their own tasks that they forget about those working around them. The natural reaction when this happens is to either hold in negative feelings or complain to another coworker. But a more proactive stance

might be to opt for open and honest communication.

“Now, I am not suggesting you go around asking people to thank you for what you are doing,” Jazwiec says. “That would be pretty obnoxious. But what you might do is ask your boss or co-workers if you are giving them everything they need from you. And you might also start showing them some appreciation. Gratitude is a two-way street. If you start making other people feel appreciated, nine times out of 10 they will not be able to hold in their appreciation for you. You don’t have to wait for one of your leaders from on high to implement a gratitude initiative. It will be just as effective if it starts with you.

“And leaders, if you feel your lack of gratitude is justified because your staff isn’t living up to their potential, communicate what’s missing,” Jazwiec says. “If this is the case, it’s likely that you are all stuck in a negativity cycle. You are unhappy with them. They sense that and become unhappy with you. Their unhappiness leads them to give less than 100% on the job...and you become even less happy with them. Get the picture? If you aren’t getting what you need from them, let them know. And when they start delivering, thank them for their efforts.”

Be prepared for some kind words. If people are unaccustomed to getting compliments, it may take some time for them to feel comfortable receiving them. “When I first started speaking, I had no idea what to say to people when they told me they liked my presentation,” Jazwiec says. “I had to rehearse being gracious and grateful. Can you imagine if someone came up to me and said, ‘I just loved your speech!’ and I responded with, ‘Whatever’?....

“Leaders, this is an important practice for you,” Jazwiec says. “It isn’t easy for many employees to approach their bosses — even when it is with a compliment — so make sure you give them the attention they deserve. Truly listen to them. Take a second, no matter what you are doing, to engage with them. And afterwards shoot them a quick e-mail or send them a note thanking them for their kind words.”

Thank those you serve. Once people have mastered the gratitude thing with their bosses and co-workers, they need to move on to the people they serve. “When I first told my staff that we ought to be thanking our patients, one of them replied, ‘What are we supposed to say? Thank you for breaking your leg?’ ” Jazwiec says. “Obviously not. I suggested they say, ‘Thank you for putting your trust in us today. Regardless of your line of work, there is no better time to start showing your customers you appreciate them than in a slow economy.

“You can do it with a simple ‘Thank you for giving us your business.’ Or you can thank them by providing other special incentives or coupons. It doesn’t really matter how you do it, just make sure they know you are grateful that they are choosing to do business with you over your competition.”

Know that gratitude encourages repeat performances. Leaders should remember that

the behavior they recognize will be repeated. If they think an employee handled a disgruntled customer well or showed great proficiency in managing a group project, let her know about it, and she'll work hard to do the same, or even better, next time. And if employees acknowledge their boss's efforts to show gratitude, she will keep doing it.

"I think it's important to recognize the fact that no one has any obligation to show gratitude to anyone else," Jazwiec says. "You don't have to thank your boss, your boss doesn't have to thank you, and neither of you have to thank your customers. But...if you do take the time to say 'thanks,' your whole organization will improve. You'll like each other more. You'll want to go the extra mile for one another. And your customers will be happier."

"I know from experience that the best places to work are places where teams are grateful for what is given to them and aren't afraid to express sincere appreciation whenever it is merited," Jazwiec says. "The best places to work are those where individuals, regardless of their position, accept compliments and praise with grace and don't second-guess the intention."

"Even in these tough times, most of us have a lot to be grateful for every day," she says. "It's important to recognize that When you seek to expand both team and individual gratitude and graciousness, your work environment will be even healthier. You will see negativity slip away, and I can almost guarantee it: You'll see your efforts reflected in the bottom line."

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