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Why Expressing Gratitude Is Good For Business And People



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When receiving feedback, we need three positives to outweigh the impact of one negative. Said differently, we hear and feel the negative with three times the strength that we experience the positive. And it makes sense. After all, even a small bit of criticism can often overshadow substantial praise.

But there's another problem: As a culture, we tend to give 10 times more negative feedback than positive feedback. So, to get really quantitative for a moment, we need 3:1 but we're getting 1:10, and this means most of us feel emotionally bankrupt most of the time. This, I believe, is why gratitude matters.

What Is Gratitude?

Gratitude is a social emotion that has the power to strengthen relationships. This is because gratitude requires us to see how we are supported and affirmed by others. Lately, I have started to think more about the power of gratitude for a simple reason: I truly believe that gratitude, when it's genuine, has the power to help transform the emotional bankruptcy we feel when confronted with negative feedback. The challenge is to start turning feedback, which is generally negative, into gratitude.

Gratitude Builds Trust And Promotes Excellence

In many respects, expressing gratitude is the sister to giving feedback. Fortunately, it is easier to be grateful than to give any type of feedback. It costs us nothing, builds our own internal resilience and empowers those around us. To appreciate how powerful gratitude is, consider the following scenario.

Over the past month, I've been juggling a staggering number of projects and contracting with more people than usual as I prepare to launch a new book and attempt to scale up my business. I know that I work at a high pace and quite frankly, sometimes it is difficult for people on my team to keep up with me. I could have lashed out (e.g., sent out a series of emails offering negative feedback about my employees' sluggish performance), but that's not what I did.

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When I felt like people on my team were lagging behind or disengaging, I reached out and expressed gratitude for their work. I can say from experience that the difference between the impact of giving negative feedback (e.g., “What happened to the report you promised to return by this morning at 8:00 a.m.?”) and offering gratitude (e.g., “I value our thought partnership. Let me know what I can do to support your work”) is astounding. Negative feedback results in lower engagement, high turnover and, quite frankly, substandard work. Gratitude builds engagement and trust, increases retention and results in higher quality work.

Can Gratitude Help Solve the Workplace Engagement Problem?

The short answer is yes. We’ve all heard about the workplace engagement problem and its impact. An estimated **\$11 billion** is lost every year due to high employee turnover. Most employees leave because they feel disengaged. In fact, an estimated **71%** (paywall) of American employees report feeling not fully engaged and another 26% report feeling actively disengaged. Above all, employees blame their lack of engagement and active disengagement on a lack or total absence of gratitude. They don’t feel seen or appreciated at work, and they don’t feel like they are being challenged.

So, what is your single greatest opportunity to tackle the engagement issue in your organization? Start catching people doing things right rather than wrong! Express your gratitude and don’t wait until there is a crisis to do so. Make expressing gratitude a regular part of your role as a leader. If you’re like me, you’ll discover that expressing gratitude builds a stronger, more engaged, and trusting team. This is good for your employees, for you and for your organization and clients.