

Unleashing the 'secret' at work

Applying the 'like-attracts-like' principle in the workplace

The secret behind *The Secret*, the best-selling book and film touted by Oprah Winfrey, isn't a very closely guarded one. It explores how the law of attraction can bring about positive change. It's a concept that can easily be applied to the work environment.

The "like-attracts-like" principle is used in successful businesses every day. Companies that value their employees effectively, such as Ryder Transportation, FedEx, Southwest Airlines and Costco, receive more value from their employees in return, leading to increased performance, productivity and profits. A study by the Jackson Organization, a Laurel, Md.-based research firm, of 31 companies of varying sizes in the American health-care industry showed a company that fails to recognize employee value effectively will average a 2.4-per-cent return on equity, whereas a company that effectively recognizes employee value triples that return (8.7 per cent). Even more impressive results were obtained with return on assets and operating margins.

Appreciation sounds like a no-brainer. It's common sense. And yet far too many companies are not doing it. During the 20 years I have worked as a trial consultant with lawyers involved in business litigation, I have had the woe! privilege of seeing the dark side of business: employees — from warehouse workers to CFOs — suing employers; customers of every ilk suing businesses of all shapes and sizes; and companies suing each other for an astonishing array of reasons. But the common underlying reason in every case is lack of appreciation.

In some way, the complaining party feels unappreciated, treated as disposable, unimportant and without value, and a lawsuit ensues. The cost to businesses is astronomical, not just in lawyers' fees and actual dollars awarded but in the time, energy and effort spent to represent or defend litigation.

Feeling unappreciated doesn't just mean lawsuits. South of the border, the United States Department of Labour says the number-one reason people leave their jobs is lack of appreciation. In 2003, Gallup conducted a poll of four million U.S. workers and found 65 per cent hadn't received a single word of praise or recognition in the past year.

So maybe appreciation isn't quite as simple



GUEST COMMENTARY

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as it seems. Maybe employers really don't know how to value and appreciate employees in a way that will motivate them to perform at their peak and be happy while doing it. It's a shame because, when people don't feel appreciated, they do not give value in return. The result? Low morale, low productivity and high turnover.

Most of us spend the majority of our waking hours at work. It's where interaction with people — all with different personalities, emotional make-ups and personal agendas — is at its peak. Work can be a miserable experience or something that's looked upon with enthusiasm. Bosses and workers alike can use valuing, the core component of appreciation, to communicate more effectively, motivate others, defuse negative situations, lift sales numbers and increase overall company morale. The difference in attitude can mean the difference between an unmotivated, disinterested workforce and a company with engaged employees who propel the company forward.

The workplace is an ideal location to put the law of attraction into practice using appreciation. Any company can do so at little or no cost: **Catch employees in the act of doing something right.** Appreciating and rewarding employees for good work on a spontaneous and unanticipated basis encourages continued good work and effort. Specific comments such as, "the specs you wrote up really make a difference to X customer" are more effective than just saying "great job."

Keep employees in the loop. Hold regular employee meetings to discuss the direction of the

FOR WORKERS

Revealing the 'secret' to workers

Workers can also use appreciation techniques. Here are a few tips for employees:

- On your way to work each day, try to think of one thing you like about your job. If you honestly can't, tell yourself instead, "Today I'm going to find one thing I like about my job." Then make it a point to find something. Over time, you'll be surprised at how much happier you'll be going in to work.

- Learn to say, "How can I help?" instead of "Whaddya want?" People are much more inclined to be appreciative of you if you answer their concerns with compassion instead of defensiveness.

- You can never say thank you too much. It doesn't matter whether it's something done automatically, such as responding when the mail person drops the mail on your desk each day, or in tougher circumstances, when your supervisor criticizes something you did. In every situation, saying "thank you" makes things run smoother. Be sure your "thank you" is genuine. A sarcastic "thank you" will never work.

company, highlighting its successes and areas needing improvement. Employees can't work in a vacuum. They need to feel what they do matters to the success of the company. Give them a stake in the company and their efforts and loyalty to the company will increase.

Discourage negative talk about anyone or anything. Don't indulge in conversations like "the economy is terrible" or "customers are a nuisance." Don't diminish the power of appreciation by bashing others.

Noelle Nelson is a Malibu, Calif.-based psychologist, consultant, speaker and author. Her most recent books are *The Power of Appreciation in Everyday Life* (Insomniac Press, 2006) and *The Power of Appreciation in Business* (MindLab Publishing, 2005). For more information, visit www.noellenelson.com.