

## People ■ Appreciation

## Culture of Appreciation

Your assets will increase in value and worth.



by Noelle Nelson

**M**OST OF US THINK we appreciate our employees. We say “good job” for work well done, we give out Employee of the Month awards, and we honor our top producers. Yet, two out of three workers say they didn’t receive a single word of praise or simple recognition in the past year. Well, you think, “That’s the other guy—I appreciate, I’m grateful.” Yet, the number 1 reason people leave jobs is lack of appreciation—not low pay, not too many hours, or too few benefits. People quit first because they don’t feel appreciated!

How much does turnover cost you? How much do you spend in recruiting, hiring, and training new hires? How much time—productivity—is lost in the process? And what about absenteeism and lack of motivation and enthusiasm? Because those who aren’t quitting, but who feel unappreciated, are coming to work less often, with less zeal and less commitment. And who incurs the cost? You. Your business. Your company.

And the cost is considerable. Appreciation has a real and measurable impact on your bottom line. Studies reveal that the degree to which people feel their company recognizes employee excellence results in dramatic differences to the company’s bottom line. Businesses effectively valuing their employees enjoy triple the returns on equity, returns on assets, and higher operating margins.

And that’s just when employee excellence is appreciated. What do you think can happen—what does happen—when you have an entire culture of appreciation? When an obsession with value, with the worth of people and situations, becomes your way of doing business?

Companies such as Southwest Airlines and See’s Candies have embraced the appreciation approach. The result? Southwest Airlines is making money while its competitors are filing for bankruptcy. See’s Candies has tremendous customer

loyalty, longevity, and profitability in an industry fraught with competition. When I interviewed the leaders of these companies, I discovered that they have a culture of appreciation.

Appreciation is not just another word for *gratitude*. Appreciation is about recognizing and caring about the value of things. This is the way the word *appreciation* is used in the marketplace: we say that land *appreciates*, gold *appreciates*, art *appreciates*—they all increase in value and in worth.

When you are genuinely concerned with the value and worth of your people, and decide to make valuing your number-one priority, the value of your business skyrockets.

The reason appreciation works so spectacularly is scientific: Appreciation



is an energy that attracts like energy. So, by valuing your employees, you attract value from them. Like attracts like. It’s not just a catchy phrase—it’s a scientific reality you can use to your direct benefit.

How? It all starts with you—whether you’re the owner, department head, manager, or supervisor—what you think and what you feel affects every person involved with your company. You set the tone, you set the pace, and you determine what is going to matter and what isn’t. You have enormous impact.

If you see your products and services as having tremendous value, those you manage will appreciate them in the same way. If you see the people who work for you as having tremendous value, those people will

want to step up to the plate for you. Your business cannot help but prosper. It’s scientific. Like attracts like.

### Five Ways to Appreciate

Here are five ways you can appreciate beyond Employee of the Month:

#### 1. Adopt an appreciative focus.

Appreciation is an active, purposeful search for the value or worth of whatever or whomever you come in contact with. Many times, your focus is on everything that’s going wrong as you come to work: all the problems that you must somehow solve or delegate to be solved. In the process, you ignore, and most emphatically fail to value, everything that’s going right.

Look at your business with new eyes. Search for what you can appreciate and find of value in every person, every moment of the day. Ask your managers to report what’s working right, where the greatest progress is being made, who’s going the extra mile. Take time to acknowledge the positive reports from your managers, ask for more details, and be enthusiastic about what they have to say.

#### 2. Problem-solve with appreciation.

When problems inevitably arise, ask employees what they think might resolve the issue. When valued this way, most workers will try to produce good solutions, especially since they often know the workings of their particular job or department better than anyone. By using this approach, you are acknowledging your employees’ value before usurping it with yours.

Of course, others will not always solve problems for you, but by valuing your workers’ ability to do so, you increase the chances that they will. And by acknowledging their value, you increase the possibility that employees will become proactive and eagerly seek solutions to future problems.

When you see value in people, you free them to be more creative, more innovative, and more valuable to your business. In addition, when employees are part of the solution-making process, they own the solution and are therefore more willing to do what it takes to see it through.

#### 3. Catch employees in the act of doing something right.

So often, we focus on only catching employees doing something wrong. In truth, catching people doing something right, something of value, is far more beneficial to your business.

Make a habit of walking around the business spontaneously. Using the

appreciation reports gleaned from your department heads, let workers know that you appreciate a specific aspect of their effort. Tell them how their "good act" was noticed and what it means to you and to the company.

Know enough about what workers are doing in different departments so you can make meaningful comments about their contributions. Specific comments are much more appreciated. Saying "You're doing a great job" isn't as meaningful as saying, "The specs you wrote up on Project X really made a difference to our customer."

Ask employees what they're working on now. Engage them in conversation about their work. Wanting to know their thoughts lets employees know that what they think and say is valuable. Look workers in the eye, use their name, and be genuinely interested in their comments.

#### **4. Create a culture of appreciation.**

Collect stories of work done well.

Make heroes of the men and women who work for and with you. We are all starved for recognition, for genuine applauding of our talents and skills. The success of TV reality shows is predicated on our need to be valued and to be seen as valuable. We want to be appreciated for who we are and want the opportunity to be winners.

Celebrate the value of those who are deserving, regardless of position or department. Celebrate workers' good acts outside of work as well. By fostering a culture that acknowledges good acts within your community, your company will reap the benefits.

Discourage negative talk and gossip about anyone or anything. Don't indulge in "the economy is terrible," "stockholders are a nuisance," or "meetings are a waste of time" conversations. Don't trash or bash others.

**5. Lead by example.** Appreciation is not a fad or technique. It is a paradigm shift, a new approach. It is even more critical today when employees often have a variety of career choices and move on when they feel unappreciated. If you want to see the tremendous advantage an appreciative approach can make, infuse your business with appreciative thoughts and practices.

It all starts with you. From you, appreciation can spread to the great benefit of your performance, productivity, and profitability. LE

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**ACTION:** Appreciate your people.