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Appreciation in the Workplace – It Really Does Make A Difference

by Alan Twigg & Fran Pangakis

You may have heard about appreciation in the workplace, its contribution to employee engagement and the role it can play in a business’s success. It’s that smart-sounding thing that, like cleaning the attic, you know would be good to do but haven’t gotten around to doing.

A lot of employers and employees think that they already do a great job of showing and communicating appreciation. Yet, here are some current and striking statistics*:

- Only 29% of employees are engaged with their work
- 54% of employees are not engaged with their work
- 17% of employees are actively disengaged, meaning they’re regularly sabotaging productive work
- 79% of employees who quit their jobs cite lack of appreciation as one of the main reasons for their leaving

Bottom line: you may not be doing as good a job as you think.

Maybe you’re wondering: why is my staff turnover higher than it should be? What about

attitudes I experience from co-workers or employees (irritability, cynicism, sarcasm, or apathy)? Maybe someone has even said: “I never know if I’m doing a good job or if you’re about to fire me.”

When it comes to management styles, people have a tendency to mimic the style they learned from previous jobs or employers. After all, we tend to do what is familiar to us. And if that style didn’t proactively embrace appreciation in the workplace, then odds are you wouldn’t naturally do it either. The good news is: you’re not stuck with that model—you can learn a different style. There are libraries full of books on management styles, and there is data on the most effective management styles.

For this article, we will focus on one component: motivating by appreciation, i.e. more carrot and less stick. Ways of expressing appreciation can vary widely. We’ve all heard about Google’s free food and flexible work time benefits. Appreciation is at once both simpler and more complex than gimmicks like ping pong games on Fridays.

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Q+A

Q: I am in Philadelphia where a new city sick leave mandate has gone into effect. Is there a new poster or notice that I’m supposed to post for my employees? Also, did I hear correctly that a new enforcement agency is going to be created to take complaints if employers fail to provide the sick leave correctly?

A: You’re right, the “Promoting Healthy Families and Workplaces” Ordinance went into effect May 13, 2015. We understand that the Managing Directors Office for the City of Philadelphia has issued a notification poster for employers to use. The poster is one of the primary ways outlined in the Ordinance in which employers can notify employees of their rights under the new law.

According to this same poster, a new “Philadelphia Sick Leave Agency” will be created by September 2015 where employees can file their specific complaints against employers. Until that time, there is no indication how complaints are to be made or handled. The poster also identifies an information email account – paysickleave@phila.gov - where employers and employees can submit questions and requests for further information.

Here are 10 easy ways to express appreciation to almost anyone:

1. Give a verbal compliment
2. Write an email
3. Stop by and see how someone is doing
4. Do something together
5. Do a small task for someone
6. See if you can help
7. Buy coffee/tea/snack
8. Give a magazine related to an area of interest
9. High five when task is completed
10. Greet each other warmly

While some claim that appreciation (or the need for it) is a generational trend—that “baby-boomers” work all day with no whining while those “millennials” can’t answer the phone without needing a compliment from their manager—the reality is everyone wants to be appreciated.

Study after study has shown that every employee wants to know what is expected of them, how they’re doing, what they could/should do better, and that they are making a difference. The fact is that everyone needs appreciation in order to do their best work. The more the appreciation aligns with the individual the greater the impact.

It is also a myth that appreciation takes too much time. Developing a habit of and spending a few dedicated minutes on appreciation with employees and co-workers on an ongoing basis takes very little time. Investing in workplace appreciation in this way can yield significant results.

Thankfully, some smart people have studied this concept and found that people’s appreciation needs are not entirely the same. Those smart people are **Dr. Gary Chapman** and **Dr. Paul White**. They have studied and authored the *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*.

Dr. Chapman is also the author of *The 5 Love Languages*, which, along with *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, is a *New York Times* bestseller. Both books are quick, excellent reads and

are highly recommended for both personal and professional growth.

One concept behind the *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* is that we all have a primary and secondary language in which we like to receive appreciation. Those languages are: **Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Gifts, Acts of Service, and Touch**. Obviously touch in the workplace can raise red flags, but an occasional high five or fist bump may, at times, be acceptable for certain people.

The Languages



1) Quality Time. Like it sounds, this is quality time and focused attention given to your employees, usually one-on-one. The important thing is quality, not quantity. Don’t fit this in when you have distractions. Block out 5-10 minutes, put your cell phone away, tell the other staff

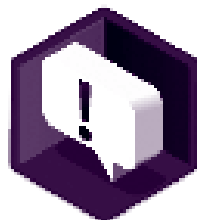
members not to disturb you, and get ready to listen. A focus on work is important; avoid just talking about trivial personal events. You may need to ask some probing questions like:

1. How are things going?
2. How’s your workload?
3. What do you think of the schedule?
4. What’s working and not working?

Getting quality answers may take time. If this is a new experience for the staff, don’t expect them to open up the first time. Trust will build with persistence and genuine connection.

Other examples of Quality Time:

- Focused attention when an employee has a question
- Genuine companionship
- Shared experiences
- Affirming feelings even if you disagree
- Personal connection through listening and sharing



2) Words of Affirmation. Saying “good job” is a good start, but take it further. Avoid blanket statements to all employees like “great work everyone, keep it up.” Find something in particular the person did, even if it’s as simple as the way s/he

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA **NEW LAW ALLOWS EMPLOYEES TO DISCUSS THEIR WAGES**

On March 11, 2015, the “Wage Transparency Act of 2014” for the District of Columbia went into effect. The Act prohibits all private employers within the District from enforcing workplace policies that “require, as a condition of employment, that an employee refrain from inquiring about, disclosing, comparing, or otherwise discussing the employee’s wages or the wages of another employee.” Employers are also prohibited from retaliating against any employee that has disclosed or is believed to have disclosed wages. Furthermore, there is nothing in the law that limits an employee’s right to discuss the wages of another employee, even when that information has been obtained improperly and without the permission of the employee whose wage information is being discussed. The Act provides an exception for certain employees who have “regular access to information regarding the wages of other employees in the course of the employee’s work.” These employees will not be allowed to disclose wages under the Act and employers may implement policies prohibiting their use of wage information.

TENNESSEE **NEW PROTECTIONS FOR HANDGUN OWNERS**

Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed legislation providing new employment protections for handgun owners. The new law provides that: “no employer shall discharge or take any adverse employment action against an employee solely for transporting or storing a firearm or firearm ammunition in an employer parking area in a manner consistent with § 39-17-1313(a).” Employers should note that the new protection extends to any adverse employment actions such as discipline, demotion, and/or cuts in pay or status. The new law gives aggrieved employees the right to sue for injunctive relief and economic damages as well as for reasonable attorney fees and costs.

OREGON **STATEWIDE PAID SICK LEAVE LAW**

On June 22, 2015, Oregon became the fourth state to enact a statewide mandatory paid sick leave law that will begin January 1, 2016. The bill requires employers with 10 or more employees (six or more for Portland employers) to provide up to 40 hours of paid sick leave to employees per year. Employers with fewer than 10 employees (fewer than six for Portland employers) will be required to provide employees with up to 40 hours of unpaid sick leave. The law applies to full-time, part-time, temporary, and seasonal employees.

Did You Know?



Tacoma, Washington passed a mandate to provide paid leave?

Starting February 1, 2016, nearly all private sector employers must provide employees who work in Tacoma specified amounts of accrued, job-protected paid leave for personal illness, family care, domestic violence, and bereavement. Tacoma is now the third city in Washington State, joining Seattle and SeaTac, to require that employers provide a paid leave benefit.

Use-it-or-lose-it policies for paid time off are a little easier in North Dakota?

An amendment to North Dakota's termination pay law adds a new provision stating that, if an employee separates from employment, an employer is not required to pay out paid time off if:

- The paid time off was awarded by the employer but not yet earned by the employee; and
- Before awarding paid time off, the employer gave the employee written notice of the limitation on payment of awarded paid time off.

The new provision will only apply to terminations that occur on or after August 1, 2015.

Seattle, Washington's New Wage Theft Ordinance imposes notice requirements on employers?

Effective April 1, 2015, Seattle employers must provide notice of employees' rights under a new Wage Theft Ordinance. The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) has issued a poster that includes the required information about the new wage theft law, as well as information about Seattle's new minimum wage law. In lieu of displaying the poster, employers can comply with this requirement by reprinting the information in a handbook, or duplicating the poster in another format such as a letter or online system that is accessible by employees. There are more requirements than this. It is recommended that Seattle employers review the regulation for full compliance.

Employers are restricted from using credit information in New York City?

New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio signed a bill that amends the City's Human Rights Law to prohibit most employers from inquiring into or considering a prospective or current employee's credit history when making employment decisions. The law will take effect on September 3, 2015.



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West Virginia – Payment of final wages and pay frequency revised

The West Virginia Wage Payment and Collection Act ("WPCA") has been amended to allow employers to pay terminated employees, whether they were discharged or they quit, all wages owed on or before the next regular payday on which such wages would otherwise have been payable.

Another revision to the WPCA modifies the frequency with which employers must pay their employees. Previously, employers were required to pay their employees at least every two weeks, which could only be modified by a "special agreement" approved by the Commissioner of Labor. Starting June 12, 2015, employers are required to pay their employees at least twice every month, and with no more than 19 days between payments, allowing for a little more flexibility with pay cycles.

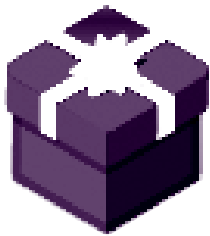
Virginia – Restrictions on employer access to social media accounts

Effective July 1, 2015, employers in Virginia will be prohibited from requiring, requesting, or causing a current or prospective employee to disclose the username and password to the individual's social media account. The new law also prohibits employers from requiring an employee to add another employee, a supervisor, or an administrator to the list or contacts associated with the individual's social media account or changing the privacy settings.

answered the phone, and compliment that person for that action. While the old adage is “critique in private, praise in public,” keep in mind that some staff will prefer individual praise over group praise.

Other examples of Words of Affirmation:

- Written appreciation; email is fine, handwritten is better
- Compliment an employee for an attitude or behavior that you enjoy, such as being optimistic
- Mention at a staff meeting the solid work someone did on a difficult project



3. Gifts. Keep it unique. Buying everyone the same present won't get you the “Boss of the Year” award, nor will be giving basketball tickets

to the person who hates sports. Gifts should be personal and unique to the individual. This requires listening and learning. There are certain gifts, like food for example, that everyone enjoys. Take your staff out for lunch, or schedule a company dinner where significant others are invited. Gifts do not have to be expensive; a small, personal gift will go much further than an expensive impersonal one.

Other gift examples (if the person enjoys these things):

- Tickets to a music show or sporting event
- A gift certificate to their favorite store or restaurant
- Spa treatments
- A small vacation or retreat to a place they want to visit
- Giving someone the afternoon off (paid) to enjoy time for themselves
- Tickets to a comedy club



4. Acts of Service.

Everyone can use a helping hand. Take note of your team and their workloads. If someone is on vacation, where is the

extra pressure? Can you assist someone with a particular project?

What if you stayed late to help the final push of a big task? Could you supply food or complete menial tasks to allow the team to focus on their project?

Keep in mind:

- Ask first, don't assume the person needs help
- Be cheerful
- Do it their way, follow their lead
- Finish the task, don't leave them hanging halfway through

Most people are not aware that these subtle language preferences exist, for themselves or others. This can create confusion, tension, and resentment. A manager may give a material gift to an employee only to find the employee marginally excited because his/her primary language is not Gifts. The manager thinks, “I would have been thrilled to receive this and s/he doesn't seem to care at all, what is wrong with her/him?”

How do you learn and understand yours and others individual languages? **Drs. Chapman and White** developed a simple quiz that identifies a person's primary and secondary languages. The assessment, coupled with an appreciation workshop, can lead to greater understandings and enhancements in the types and kinds of interactions that take place.

While it can be challenging to address everyone, you can mix it up to increase your odds of hitting on something that works. For example, you may consider a once or twice-a-year event that combines multiple languages. For example:

1. Take the staff on a weekend retreat where you discuss challenges and solutions for the office

2. Close the office early and have a catered lunch organized, or self-directed

3. Do a company trip to a city with entertainment that everyone enjoys, mixing group and individual time

4. Have the next local company event somewhere fun like a bowling alley

Conclusion

Many business owners like to say “our business doesn't exist without our #1 priority: our customers.”

Where would your business be without your employees? Where would your employees be without you?

You have your goals, they have theirs. It's a symbiotic relationship. Yet, those employers and employees do not have a habit of showing appreciation.

To get started with appreciation in your workplace, use the top 10 list provided. Also, use the examples listed with each language. Try them out. See what works. The benefits of an engaged, appreciated workforce are numerous:

- Increased productivity and attendance
- Better employee interactions
- Improved relationships
- Increased job satisfaction
- Lower turnover and human resources costs
- Stronger loyalty
- Higher employee morale
- Enjoying coming to work!

It has been said that it is better to give than to receive. The science now backs that up. By giving to your employees and your co-workers, you become happier and more fulfilled. You start a positive feedback loop that yields tangible financial results and reduced stress. Give it a try today!

*Source: *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*

Q: It seems to me that my state, Connecticut, has been active lately in imposing new rules on employers. Can you tell me about anything recent that I need to be concerned with?

A: Indeed Connecticut has brought about some changes recently. Here is a breakdown of three new changes that may impact you:

Prohibition against pay secrecy policies:

The newly enacted law called “Public Act No. 15-196” prohibits all employers from banning discussions about wages or otherwise penalizing employees for discussing wages. This went into effect July 1, 2015. Employees are now protected in their right to discuss their own wages and the wages of co-workers who have voluntarily disclosed that information.

Harassment and discrimination protections now applicable to unpaid interns:

On June 22, 2015, Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed a law providing protection against workplace harassment, discrimination and retaliation for unpaid interns. Previously, it was unclear whether an individual working as an unpaid intern was protected from these or not. As a result of the enactment of “Public Act 15-56”, as of October 1, 2015, unpaid interns will be provided the same protections as employees covered by the Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act (“CFEPA”).

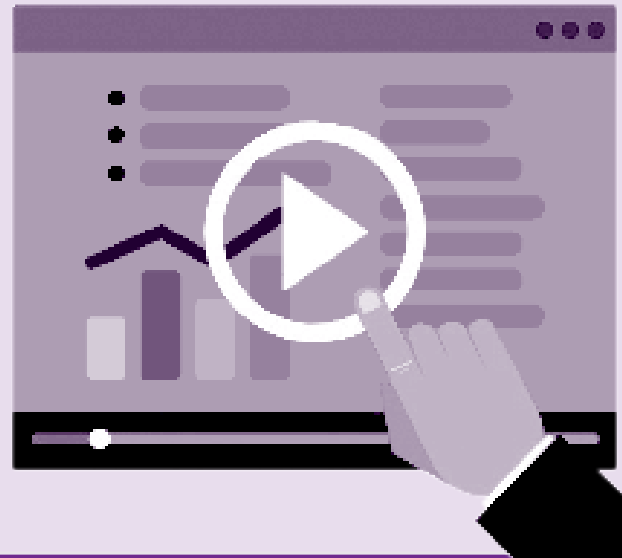
Double damages for failing to comply with minimum wage or overtime:

A new law called “An Act Concerning an Employer’s Failure to Pay Wages” (Public Act 15-86) applies to private and public employers of any size, including the state and municipalities, and is effective October 1, 2015. Double damages plus court costs and attorney’s fees must now be awarded if a court finds that an employer has (1) failed to pay an employee’s wages, accrued fringe benefits, or arbitration award or (2) failed to meet the law’s requirements for an employee’s minimum wage or overtime rates.

Q: I’m in Indiana. My colleague just told me that a new law is in effect that prevents me from terminating an employee because of restraining orders or something like that. Is this true?

A: Back in May, the Governor of Indiana signed legislation that amends the law and provides protection to employees who have sought an order of protection. This went into effect July 1, 2015. Employers are now prohibited from terminating an employee based on:

- the employee’s filing of a petition for a protective order to protect the employee, whether or not the protective order has been issued; or
- the actions of an individual against whom the employee has filed a protective order.



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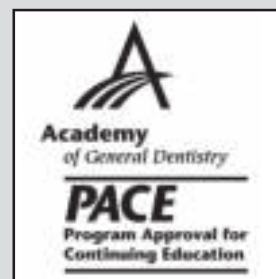
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