

Praising for Performance

Most managers have heard that providing positive reinforcement will improve team performance and motivation. During my career I've been surprised how few managers actually praise to their team members. Here are four steps that can help you provide effective praise to your team:

1. Praise the performance that deserves the praise.

All too often people praise someone on their team by saying something like, *"Bob, you did a good job today."*

What exactly does this mean? How will the employee interpret it? What was the specific performance that deserved the recognition?

It is important that you are specific when providing positive reinforcement. For example, an employee has just dealt with a customer who was irate upon entering the store but left smiling and satisfied. You could say something like,

"Excellent work, Mark. You did an excellent job calming down that customer."

2. Communicate it clearly and sincerely.

A challenge that is faced by many managers is that they are uncomfortable providing praise to their team. The result? They aren't clear when discussing positive performance with an individual. They ramble on too long or hide the praise in filler words such as "um" and "ah". The employee then hears a message that is confusing and difficult to understand. This means that the positive reinforcement will not have as much impact as you intend. Learn to be direct when praising an individual or group of individuals.

"Jill, I wanted to thank-you for coming in on your day off to cover for John."

3. Acknowledge the commitment and effort.

When you praise an employee's performance acknowledge their effort and commitment; that is, how hard they worked and how involved they were with it. For example, if an individual worked later because it was busy you could say,

"Karen, thanks for sticking around tonight. I appreciate the extra effort you made to ensure that our customers were well taken care of."

4. Ensure it is timely

When you praise an employee, ensure that it is timely. Praise the performance as soon as you are aware that it deserves recognition. If too much time elapses the individual may perceive the praise as an afterthought and it will have little, if any, positive impact. Managers frequently see an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement and, because they are busy at the moment, chose to tell the employee later. Unfortunately, what happens is that they get caught up in the day-to-day challenges and pressures of running a retail organization and they inadvertently forget to talk to the individual. The

consequence is an employee who performed well but didn't receive recognition. This, in turn, can cause their future performance to deteriorate or decline.

One of the challenges many managers face when it comes time to praise employees is that they are uncomfortable providing this recognition. If this describes you, try this approach:

On paper, write down what you want to say to your employee. It shouldn't be any more than two or three lines. In other words, keep it brief. Once you have completed this practice verbally stating the praise. This will increase your comfort level and help you deliver the compliment more effectively. Then, provide the recognition to your team member.

Most management or leadership books will tell you to praise in public. My belief is that you should praise someone in an environment that will be most comfortable for the individual. Some people are very uncomfortable with public recognition and praise that is delivered in front of their peers can end up becoming a de-motivator. This means that you need to know your employees.

Recognition is something that every employee craves. If you are truly committed to improving your team's performance invest a few minutes every day recognizing their efforts. When you notice great performance don't wait to praise the employee, tell them immediately and follow these points:

1. Be specific
2. Be clear & concise
3. Acknowledge their effort
4. Make it timely

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