

Acknowledgement Earns Workplace Engagement

By Patricia Morgan

We all crave to be seen, heard and acknowledged. Whether I say that to individuals, groups or large audiences, heads nod in the affirmative. When I first began working in a counselling agency, I was thrilled with the supervision. My manager smiled, nodded and listened as I worked out my problems through non-stop, extroverted talking. As I exited from his office, I would turn, thank him for his time and he would respond with a generous laugh and a big "You're most welcome." I left notes of appreciation on his desk and the occasional homemade muffin. I was surprised, therefore, when I learned that long-time employees felt frustrated by his lack of wise guidance. The lesson? Acknowledgement and a sense of gratitude improve working conditions whether it is sent or received by employees or management.

"Sawu Bona" is a South African greeting which literally means, "I see you." Its deeper meaning is "because you are there, I exist," that "without each other, we literally do not exist." Imagine what your workplace would be like if this acknowledgement was genuinely sent and received on a daily basis.

Appreciation is undervalued by many organizations while being a key ingredient for a thriving workplace. This is the conclusion from countless management experts and research projects. In *How Full is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life*, Tom Rath and Dr. Donald Clifton said that the main reason most North Americans leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated. Their conclusions also include:

- Sixty-five percent of Americans received no recognition at work last year.
- Five positive interactions are needed to counteract one negative interaction.

Appreciation has the biggest impact when it is given randomly. B.F. Skinner discovered that random reinforcement more strongly anchors behaviors than consistent reward. Consider how we view bosses who arrange a *surprise* on Administrative Assistants' Day compared to a boss who for no reason acts with a gesture of appreciation. It's similar to gestures of affection in intimate relationships. Compare the romantic scale of a single rose gifted on Valentine's Day with one given on an *ordinary* day.



Ten Tips for Acknowledging

"I see you. I hear you."

1. Minimize negative words and phrases such as *can't, but, no, never, always, should* and *impossible*.
2. Avoid saying *You are* followed by *wrong, incompetent, at fault* or any blame-throwing words.
3. Remind yourself that most of us are doing the best we can.
4. Listen first to discern what is going on for the other person.
5. Acknowledge feelings. Feelings are never right or wrong.
6. Acknowledge people's best intentions. If you don't know what they intended, assume that their intentions were *to do no harm*.
7. Note and comment on people's accomplishments and strengths.
8. Act as if you are a cheerleader or a supportive coach.
9. Learn to watch and listen with a sense of gratitude.
10. Express appreciation.

The above excerpt is from ***From Woe to WOW: How Resilient Women Succeed at Work*** (<http://www.FromWoeToWOW.org>) by counselor and speaker, Patricia Morgan. Contact Patricia to help your people become stress hardy at 403-242-7796, patricia@SolutionsForResilience.com or www.SolutionsForResilience.com

