

Bob Cooper on Giving Thanks as a Manager

During the holiday season we are reminded to give thanks and extend our best wishes to family, friends, and colleagues. It's a time to step back and reflect upon the accomplishments achieved in collaboration with your team, and feel a sense of gratitude for what you have.

Do you take the time to acknowledge the contributions of others? Do you have a full appreciation for the importance of giving praise?



Many years ago I had an eye opening meeting with an engineering director named Pete. The purpose of the meeting was to update Pete on the progress of my work with several members of his team. I facilitated a process improvement initiative that ended up saving the company over one hundred thousand dollars. In spite of this outcome, the group had very low morale. One day I stopped one of our meetings and asked the team why they were so upset. They said "Pete doesn't value us." I asked "Why do you feel this way?" Their response was "He never shows appreciation for our work." I shared this story with Pete in an attempt to provide him with a valuable insight. His response was "I don't need to tell them how much I value them, they are engineers and should know how well they are doing." I said "Pete, everyone wants to be appreciated. It's not based on one's position or degree. You need to express to your team how much you value them."

To this day, I can still see Pete struggling to understand the importance of giving thanks.

The following are a few suggestions for leaders regarding expressing thanks:

1. **Make it a priority to catch people doing things right,** and let them know the importance of their work. For example, if you see a staff member going the extra mile to serve a customer, express thanks. If you see a member of your team assisting a colleague with a difficult issue, give thanks.
2. **As you walk around ask others for feedback.** Ask staff to let you know about co-workers either within your department or from another section who did something special for them or a customer. Take the time to let the individual deserving of the praise know how grateful you are for their efforts. It's important to celebrate successes.
3. In staff meetings, **acknowledge the team for achieving certain goals, and praise examples of excellence.** Give each team member the opportunity to express thanks to a colleague for any support provided that they appreciate. This builds a sense of team and keeps the meeting positive.
4. **Thank a staff member who brings a mistake to you,** and accepts full accountability for the error, and has a plan to fix the problem. You might be thinking – why should I praise someone who is bringing me a mistake? If you criticize mistakes, you create a fear based environment, and thus, people might look to cover up the mistake. Of course, you are not praising a mistake, but rather acknowledging the individuals integrity.
5. **Engage staff in brainstorming ideas** to improve departmental performance, and give thanks for their input. You are encouraging creativity and innovation, and must not criticize an idea. After the brainstorming is completed, you can take the time to engage the team in clarifying and prioritizing ideas. What's important

to remember as a leader is this – if you judge every idea as either “good” or “bad”, how do you think the person who offered a “bad” idea is going to feel? Every idea needs to be given fair consideration with an objective assessment relative to its potential impact on achieving a positive outcome.

What do you believe is more important – a good strategy or a highly engaged and motivated group of people? They are both very important. However, if you and your competitors have similar strategies, **the organization that has done a better job of engaging both the hearts and minds of its employees will always win.** Highly engaged and motivated employees will assist you to develop sound strategies, and help to revise strategies as required to maintain a competitive advantage. They will want to do everything possible to help you win.

One of your most important jobs is to let your team know how much you value them. **They want to know you care.** They want to know that you do not take them for granted. They want to know that you see them as unique individuals with unique talents. They want to know that you see their potential, and will do everything possible to assist them to reach their full potential.

Great leaders know that their employees are, and always will be, their most important asset. They want to know that you care about their careers and will serve as a trusted mentor focusing on their success.

I have emphasized this in many previous tips – **you must serve your staff.** If you serve them well, they will produce outstanding results. You help to remove barriers and provide the tools needed for success.

I encourage you throughout this holiday season and into the future to take the time to let your staff know how much you value them.

I have one more thing to add. What makes this all work is not just giving praise, but **really meaning it**. If you fake it, you can cause more damage. When others know you really mean it – you will have loyal followers prepared to leave your competition in the dust.

*RL Cooper Associates' book "**Heart and Soul in the Boardroom**" outlines suggestions for leaders to develop highly respectful and ethical work cultures and is available in the **Manage My Practice Store**. For additional information about their services, please visit www.rlcooperassoc.com.*



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