

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

March 15, 2011

Helping Your Team Feel Valued

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Few things are more vital to personal performance than a positive sense of self-worth.

When people have a positive sense of self-worth, they tend to thrive and strive, whatever the challenge. Take away that sense of self-worth, and the same challenge leaves them dispirited or even depressed.

As leaders, needing to bring out the best in people, we have a vested interest in strengthening the self-worth of every person on our team. This doesn't mean that we must become therapists. But it does call for us to understand some basic principles of self-worth.

Three Critical Questions

To say that something has "worth" means that it has value. Thus, our personal sense of self-worth is a value judgment. And we make this value judgment about ourselves by asking three distinct questions of the world.

- First, is there any value to who I am?
- Second, is there any value to what I do?
- Third, is there any value to what I may become?

We put these questions to the world in a myriad of direct and indirect ways on a regular basis. The simple little hallway greeting of "Hi! How are you doing?" is a quick, ritualized way of asking, "Do you still value me?"

Should you think that I've overstated this case, notice what happens inside of you when someone ignores your hallway greeting and walks by you without a word. What you feel inside at that moment is hardly a high sense of self-worth.

Commending More Than Performance

In the workplace, I've noticed, our commendations of people center almost entirely on performance. "You did a good job!!" In fact, "Great job!" is probably the most common commendation, both at work and elsewhere. It's our way of saying, "I value what you do."

We are less adept in the workplace of sending a message which says, "I value who you are." Yet, in terms of self-worth, this may be the far more important message. We have a universal need to be appreciated for who we are, not just for what we do.

Robert Frost captured this concept in his poem *The Death of the Hired Hand*, when he wrote, "Home is the place that when you go there, they have to take you in."

Frost was saying that we all need a place where we are valued for who we are, whether we've won or lost, whether we soared or completely flopped.

Showing Appreciation

The workplace, of course, is not a hearthside. A worker's continued presence in the workplace is ultimately predicated on whether he or she performs well. But this does not mean that leaders and managers can disregard the importance of helping people feel valued for who they are.

When we show appreciation for what people do, but never for who they are, we risk their alienation. They may easily conclude that we value them only for what we can get out of them. To have value only for what we do is demeaning and degrading. It's the very way slaves and prostitutes are treated.

Wise leaders therefore make a point of affirming how important each member of their team is to them as a person, separate and apart from performance. Sometimes the affirmation is made directly, with a statement like, "I just want you to know how much I treasure having you on our team."

Most commonly it is done non-verbally by giving people our time, giving them our undivided attention, listening attentively to their input, and having a smile of appreciation on our face as we talk to them. Just remember, none of us feels valued by someone who gives us neither time nor attention.

And when people know that we value them for who they are, they respond to our leadership more productively. People take coaching and correction most readily from someone who clearly values them. And because feeling valued is so important to us, we all tend to work harder to please any leader who makes us feel valued for who we are.

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