

# **LeaderPerfect Newsletter**

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## **Four Ways to Keep Employees Feeling Unappreciated**

by Dr. Mike Armour

In the ten years I've published this newsletter, no issue has sparked more positive feedback than my [recent article](#) on helping employees feel valued.

The response speaks to how much people feel unvalued today. Especially in the workplace. And since most of us spend more hours at work than anywhere else, feeling unvalued at work has a telling impact on our overall outlook on life.

Yet, when I talk with executives and managers, they all insist that they value their team. How can it be possible, then, that workers feel so under-valued?

I'm increasingly convinced that the leading culprit is not leadership indifference toward workers. Rather, busy executive schedules are to blame.

With so many alligators snapping at them, managers easily lose proper focus on affirming the value of their team. Harried and pressured, they seldom step back and look at the non-verbal "value message" that their actions are sending.

When I ask workers why they feel unvalued by their boss, I hear the same litany of complaints time and again. Here are some of the most frequent themes in worker complaints.

### **The Manager Who Under-Compliments**

I've actually talked with managers who believe that the way to get employees' best effort is to keep them in suspense about how well they are doing. Not knowing where they stand keeps them on their toes, so the theory goes. I've never talked to a worker, however, who shared that viewpoint.

Other bosses are like the husband in counseling whose wife complained that he never said that he loved her. The offended husband retorted indignantly, "When I married you 20 years ago, I told you that I loved you. And if I ever change my mind, you will be the first to know."

Bosses who fall into this category naively believe that once they have affirmed a worker's value, nothing further needs to be said. Such bosses typically pride themselves

on their personal integrity and being true to their word. Thus, when they have stated something once, they see no need to say it again.

What they overlook is that the impact of a message dissipates with time. Marketers understand this principle well. That's why they bombard us with the same marketing message for weeks on end. Workers, like customers, need regular reminders that they are valued.

And finally, there are those bosses — and I've met scores of them — who do not believe compliments are in order for people who are simply doing their job the way that it's supposed to be done. "Why should I compliment someone for doing their duty?" they say.

These are typically managers who are themselves motivated by a high personal sense of duty. And they assume that anyone worthwhile is similarly motivated.

Truth is, even people who have a strong sense of duty may have other values (such as being appreciated) that rank even higher on their motivational scale. Based on my own long-term observation, being appreciated seems to be a greater motivator for most people than is fulfilling their duty.

### **The Manager Who Over-Compliments**

While managers who under-compliment rarely say, "Good job," another group of managers say "Good job" all the time. When compliments are over-used, they eventually become meaningless to employees. "Good job" starts sounding like a rote phrase from the manager's lips.

Managers who tend to over-work phrases like "good job" need to periodically expand on their routine statement. Occasionally they should add a comment such as, "I specifically appreciate the way you . . . ." The follow-on statement takes away the sense that the compliment is merely perfunctory.

Another problem with over-complimenting is that workers generally know when fellow-workers are doing a good job. When they see a lackluster performance, but then hear that person commended for a "good job," it cheapens the value of all other compliments from the boss's mouth.

### **The Manager Who Is Never Satisfied**

I could fill a book with stories that employees have told me about managers who seem never to be satisfied. The typical story line goes something like this: "My boss gave me an assignment with very few guidelines, even though I asked for them. Then when I completed the assignment, the boss blasted my work, saying, 'This is not what I wanted at all.'"

Managers and supervisors like this expect the employee to be a mind-reader. They don't provide sufficient details and guidance when making assignments. They may not have even taken time to gain clarity themselves on what they actually expect.

As a result, when asked for guidance, they have little to offer. But at an unconscious level they obviously do have a sense of what they are looking for. Otherwise they would not reject the employee's effort as not what I wanted.

Until you are quite clear on your own expectations regarding an assignment, you are not yet ready to make the assignment. It's not fair to your employee.

And if your employees regularly disappoint you with the way that they carry out assignments, perhaps its time to ask whether the problem is with you and the manner in which you communicate assignments in the first place.

### **The Manager Who Doesn't Have Time**

To feel valued workers need to know that they can have the undivided attention of their manager. Sadly, managers often communicate with employees while simultaneously doing something else.

One worker I know holds a vital company position in a huge corporation. But any time she can get on her boss's calendar, she know that she will find him answering emails while talking to her. Other bosses are prone to checking their Blackberry every few moments while conversing with workers. Then there is the boss who sorts through paperwork on the desk while meeting with subordinates.

Practices like this send a message that says, "I really don't have time for you." Or even worse, "What you offer is not worth my undivided attention." And when these practices persist, the sense of being unimportant to the manager trumps any compliments that the employee may be be paid along the way.

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