



PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONS

3 Ways Giving Thanks Drives Growth

OVERVIEW

How often do you express thanks to your team?

Gratitude can have numerous benefits in the workplace. From building employee and customer loyalty to strengthening the culture of a company, expressions of gratitude can have powerful effects. Research demonstrates that employee engagement is key to retention, productivity, and loyalty. Genuinely expressing gratitude can help bolster engagement. One survey, for example, found that 80% of employees were more motivated by feeling appreciated – with only 40% motivated by a demanding boss or fear of losing their job. Increasingly, leaders, managers, and executives are beginning to see the benefits of showing gratitude across their team.

Seymour Adler, industrial psychologist and a Partner in Aon's Talent & Rewards Practice, states that gratitude is key to effective leadership. "We see that recognition and feeling appreciated is not only a factor in employee engagement, but that it also impacts how an individual and the overall team performs," he continues, "strong leaders recognize the need to appreciate their teams."

So what are the benefits of showing gratitude in the workplace and how can we better say 'thank you'?

IN DEPTH

Actively showing gratitude towards team members can be a powerful management tool. Saying 'thank you' costs nothing, but can have some powerful business benefits, making it an easy and cost-effective way to improve productivity.

The positive effects of gratitude:

1) Gratitude Can Help Teams Appreciate Their Achievements, Boosting Engagement

It can be easy to fixate on negatives – but actively reflecting on and being thankful for the positives can have a beneficial effect. One study shows that thinking about how something good might never have happened can make you happier than just trying to appreciate that it happened.

And how can you put this into practice? Reminding teams about what might not have been without their hard work, and explicitly thanking them for that impact, can help them recognize what they've achieved and the impact it's making on their career. This in turn can help boost engagement, as the desire for career opportunities remains one of the top drivers of employee engagement globally.

2) Gratitude Can Lead To Positive Outcomes, Whatever The Task

According to the Harvard Business Review, 75 percent of job success can be predicted by optimism levels, social support and ability to see stress as a challenge instead of as a threat. On the other hand, only 25% of success is predicted by IQ. If a manager is able to express positive feedback, teams are likely to feel more optimistic about their ability to deliver on the work as a whole, which will improve performance and personal productivity. Appreciative inquiry, for example, is a conversational model that focuses on positive environments to drive candid feedback. Using this method, questions are posed to allow others to engage in a meaningful conversation focused on positives – allowing others to show their best side through constructive feedback. Both parties are likely to be more engaged and the feedback process will help team members to feel appreciated.

3) Gratitude Can Have Health Benefits and Reduce Stress

Negative work environments can make the workplace more stressful. According to research by Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California – Davis, practicing gratitude on a daily basis reduces stress hormones by 23%. It can even help detoxify a workplace at a biochemical level. According to Evans, it lowers levels of creatinine and C-reactive protein, and helps reduce negative emotions such as envy, resentment, regret and depression.

How To Make "Thank You" More Impactful:

1) Connect "Thanks" To Something Larger

Taking a step back from the day-to-day operations to evaluate how a project went provides a good opportunity to express appreciation for the collective efforts teams put into projects. However, these acts of gratitude can be more effective if they are linked to the wider purpose of the organization. The most effective types of expression of gratitude both recognize the efforts of the team *and* connect those efforts to the mission of the organization. "When possible, leaders should take the effort to demonstrate to their teams that their actions are not only valued, but also contribute significantly to the organization's success in a big-picture way," explains Adler.

2) Foster Team-Based Recognition And Rewards

Adler also advises that the way gratitude is expressed is important to the culture of the organization: "When individuals are rewarded individually, a culture of individualism is fostered." Individualistic cultures tend to discourage expressions of appreciation, and can even pull teams apart, as individuals become recognized and appreciated not for group contributions, but for their own.

Collective recognition and rewards programs, on the other hand, can encourage team-based collaboration and “create a culture of appreciation, as opposed to a culture of individualism,” ultimately creating more productive teams. Meetings to celebrate success, meals together, or other collective celebrations may be more effective than individual rewards.

3) Look For Opportunities To Make It Personal And Put Pen To Paper

Look for opportunities to celebrate, recognize, and thank those around you. Make it personal and actually put pen to paper with a written message of gratitude.

For the decade he ran the company, Doug Conant, former CEO of Campbell Soup, sent over 30,000 handwritten thank you notes to employees – from maintenance people to senior executives. By actively engaging his staff and with these small gestures of gratitude, he was able to generate a sense of loyalty not only to him personally, but also to the company as a whole. This personalization arguably made his employees more receptive to the strategic changes he made to the company, and encouraged them to stay with the organization while transformations were made. When Conant joined Campbell Soup, Fast Company reported that it was one of the worst performing food companies worldwide. By 2009, through his leadership and efforts with employee engagement, the company went through a complete turnaround.

Whether a casual ‘thank you’ in an email or a more formal team lunch, these acts of gratitude, however small, “can go a long way in showing both an individual as well as a team that their hard work is appreciated and recognized,” says Adler.

Give Thanks – And Drive Business Growth

There is growing evidence that gratitude can generate the optimism which leads to success, reduce stress levels at work, help teams recognize what they have achieved, and generate loyalty amongst both employees and customers.

Global skills shortages are making attracting and retaining the right talent to drive long-term growth an increasing challenge. In this environment, employee engagement can have a positive impact on an organization’s success. Those two little words, ‘thank you,’ take no time at all to say, but can be one of the most powerful tools in a successful leader’s toolbox.



TALKING POINTS



“Sending a quick text of thanks does not fully express gratitude, nor is it as rewarding as writing a thank you note. Making the extra effort to say thanks in a genuine, personal manner goes a long way. In an age where most of us are staring at screens for most of the day, picking up a pen and paper and really thinking about what you have to be thankful for can be therapeutic too.” – Richard Branson, Founder, Virgin Group



“Gratitude also helps us cope with crisis. Consciously cultivating an attitude of gratitude builds up a sort of psychological immune system that can cushion us when we fall. There is scientific evidence that grateful people are more resilient to stress, whether minor everyday hassles or major personal upheavals.” – Robert Emmons, Professor of Psychology, University of California, Davis



FURTHER READING

- Thank You! Gratitude Is the Best Retention Strategy – Business News Daily, October 9, 2016
- How to Utilize the Power of Gratitude at Work – Lab Manager, July 28, 2016
- Master These 35 Inexpensive Employee Appreciation Day Ideas – Justworks.com, May 11, 2016
- The Power Of Thank You At Work – LifeHacker India, September 29, 2016
- Here's The Exact Thank-You Email To Send After Someone Does You A Professional Favor – Business Insider, November 2, 2016

