



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 122

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 15)

The Twelve Questions

Taking the time to recognize and praise good performance.

Question 4: "In the last 7 days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

Praise and recognition are essential building blocks of a great workplace. We all possess the need to be recognized as individuals and to feel a sense of accomplishment. There is nothing complicated about recognition, but it is one of the items that consistently receives the **lowest** ratings from employees.

Historically, praise and recognition in the workplace has been handled from the perspective of "If you don't hear anything, assume you're doing a good job." In contrast to this "old industrial workplace" mindset, the new knowledge-based worker relies and depends upon praise and recognition as the means of defining what is valued by the organization. Today, praise and recognition are communication vehicles for what is deemed as important.

Obviously, recognition can be either positive or negative. Gallup has found, however, that positive and negative recognition are not opposites. Instead, the opposite of any kind of recognition is being ignored. The worst possible thing we can do to someone at work today is to ignore him or her! Workplaces that continue to abide by the old culture ("If you don't hear anything, . . . ") will destroy the very human spirit that makes the true difference in quality output, service delivery and mission performance.

Although recognition can be either positive or negative, effective recognition has the following characteristics: it is positive in nature, immediate and real-time to performance, specific about what is being praised, and close to the action. Many organizations have formal recognition programs that seem to have limited effectiveness. This is probably because these programs do not always give employees a clear idea of what, exactly, is being recognized, i.e., productivity, growth, and so on. There can also be times when credit is given where credit is not due, such as rewarding the weatherman for a bright and sunny day.

Positive recognition is often thought of as coming strictly from supervisors or managers, but Gallup has found that employees cherish praise and recognition from peers. Coworkers know intimately the

particulars of a job and when they notice excellence, it is a special event. So, praise and recognition do not just come "from the top down" anymore -- it can even come from the bottom up!

Making sure that every employee has a quality relationship with someone who can guide them.

Question 5: "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."

Gallup's research indicates that employees don't leave companies, they leave managers and supervisors. The impact that a supervisor has in today's workplace can be either very valuable or very costly to the organization and the people who work there.

All of us as employees have had the unpleasant experience of having a bad supervisor or manager. Many of us have also experienced the results and benefits of a good one. When Gallup evaluates the difference between bad and good supervisors, it is amazing to see how clear the difference is in the minds of employees. Yet, when we ask employees, "Do you want to be managed?" everyone says "No." Why is this? Because we automatically think of our bad experiences. What if someone who is similar to the best supervisor one has had could manage the employee? Would he or she want to be managed in that case? Undoubtedly yes. So, the issue is really this: What makes a great manager?

Gallup finds that great managers and supervisors possess identifiable talents or recurring patterns of thought, feelings and behaviors. These talents include getting a true sense of satisfaction out of seeing their employees grow and succeed, even if the employee's success surpasses that of the manager. Great managers also intrinsically know how to match the right person with the right roles to produce the best possible results; they set expectations by defining the desired outcome; they don't dissect every role down to the exact steps needed to accomplish it; they help people grow within a role instead of grow out of it; and they always try to bring out what is left in versus trying to put in what was left out.

Great supervisors genuinely care about the people they work with, and thus treat people according to their individuality rather than treating everyone the same. Supervisors are the filters from which broader organizational changes and initiatives make sense to individual employees and thus gain true acceptance and understanding. One could speculate that people are not resistant to change; they just don't have the relationships to translate how such modifications will impact them and their jobs.

For years, Gallup has learned from surveys that the credibility of senior management is critical to employee perceptions of the organization. This led them to consult with CEOs and leaders to encourage them to have greater visibility and clearer communications. Then, three years ago, Gallup made a discovery: Employee perceptions of senior management credibility are largely driven by the quality of relationships employees have with their supervisors. Thus, the CEO should feel compelled to ensure that all employees have a caring relationship with their managers or designates.

Next: Question #6 of 12: "There is someone at work who encourages my development."

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: "*First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently.*" For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.

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