

Secrets of Recognition: Positive Words that Influence

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Joanne had stayed late to finish the report. When she left the file on her manager's desk, the workplace was empty and the night was dark. The next morning her boss called her into his office. He immediately pointed out a number of errors, "Your data is off by 5%. Your conclusion cannot be validated because of this error. You spelled Mr. Herman's name incorrectly and the due date is the 15th, not the 17th. Can you get the corrections done in the next half-hour? We need to get this report off today."

He was factual, frank and logical. However, Joanne walked away feeling criticized, unappreciated and insignificant with low energy. She also felt a familiar twinge of shame similar to when she was a little girl and her mother had tongue-lashed her. Then she began to consider handing in her resignation.

The fear of rejection is not only experienced by those challenged by a diagnosis of borderline personality but also by most of us. Dr. Jack Rosenberg, author of *Body, Self and Soul*, psychoanalyst Alice Miller, John Bradshaw and many other healers, describe how, as adults, we are triggered into re-experiencing disappointments and traumas from our childhood. Even little hurts, like Joanne's experience with her boss, can cause feelings of rejection when we don't experience basic recognition.

Habits of giving criticism and recognition are learned behaviours. Some managers, parents and leaders have naturally critical minds, which prevent many unforeseen problems. However, too much disapproval can ruin connection, enthusiasm, productivity, loyalty and self-worth. Don't we all want to be seen, heard and acknowledged for our efforts?

As human resource specialist, Susan Heathfield, says, "People who feel appreciated are more positive about themselves and their ability to contribute." Her belief is backed up by research. A dissertation from Benedictine University in 2000 called "Appreciative Inquiry" concluded that workers who felt appreciated by management were 52% less likely to look for different employment. Money is an important compensation for work but so are human factors such as being valued.

Those who have more influence and power over others, whether as role models, managers or parents, can do more injury with criticism or they can provide more encouragement with validation. It has been said in many ways that "Those with authority carry more responsibility." Here are responsible ways to give recognition whether it is at work, home or in your community:

1. Filter your critical comments by asking yourself what people really

need to function at their best. See article *Calming Criticism* at www.lightheartedconcept.com

2. Minimize negative words such as "can't," "but," "no," "never," "always," "should," and "impossible."
3. Be cautious of beginning your sentences with "You" followed by "are wrong," "are incompetent," "need to," and "are at fault."
4. Remind yourself that most of us are doing the best that we can.
5. Listen first to discern what is going on for the other person.
6. Acknowledge feelings. They are never right or wrong.
7. Acknowledge people's best intentions. If you don't know what they intended guess that their intentions were the very best.
8. Note and comment on people's accomplishments and strengths.
9. Act as if you are a cheerleader or a supportive coach.
10. Increase phrases of recognition and encouragement such as:
 - I appreciate your effort.
 - Thank you for your time and contribution.
 - I like your eagerness.
 - I see you put in a lot of time working on this.
 - I believe you put a lot into this.
 - You look like you could use some help.
 - I imagine this project has been difficult for you.
 - You deserve some helpful suggestions.
 - I know we can figure this out.

It is too bad that Joanne's boss did not run into Shirley MacLaine when she said, "Dwelling on the negative simply contributes to its power." He then might not have risked devaluing and losing a valuable worker but instead used powerful secrets of recognition.

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