

2014 ARSL Conference

The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace

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(Based on *The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* By Gary Chapman and Paul White)

Introduction:

The language of appreciation is vital to any environment where people are together on a consistent basis. It is so vital that when it is not present that environment will suffer greatly and will eventually become unbearable to exist within.

The majority of the information that I will present today comes from the book, *The Five Appreciation Languages in the Workplace* by Gary Chapman and Paul White. I have been given permission by Dr. Paul White to use the information from their book. Also, I will share from my experience with working with people over the last twenty years and how the principles in this book have played a vital role in building relationships with people. Last, I will share DeSoto Parish Library's journey down the appreciation highway. In September of last year, we held a day long in-service training on the Appreciation Languages. It has dramatically changed the footprint of the library. I have several goals that I would like to achieve in our short time together.

- to inform you about the concept of languages of appreciation, practically describing what they are and what they look like in daily life
- to help you identify your primary, secondary, and least meaningful languages of appreciation
- to assist you in seeing how the languages of appreciation can be utilized to improve workplace relationships in a variety of contexts
- to give you tools and suggestions for applying the principles in your daily life

Here is the question. Do you feel appreciated by the people with whom you work? If so, then you probably enjoy going to work each day. However, if you do not feel appreciated, then your work may simply be a means of keeping food on the table. All of us expect to get paid for the work we do unless we are a volunteer. Most paid employees would like to make more money. But the number one factor in job satisfaction is not the amount of pay but whether or not the individual feels appreciated and valued for the work they do.

According to research conducted by the US Department of Labor, 64 percent of Americans who leave their jobs say they do so because they don't feel appreciated.¹ This is true of employees across the board, from CEOs to housekeeping staff. Something deep within the human psyche cries out for appreciation. When that need is unmet, then job satisfaction will be diminished.

I. Part One: In Order to Appreciate, You MUST Initiate

Research indicates that employees favor recognition from managers and supervisors by a margin of 2-1 over recognition from coworkers.² However, most of us would agree that if we feel appreciated by our coworkers, life is much more pleasant. Whether you are a business owner, CEO, supervisor, or a coworker, this workshop is designed to help you communicate appreciation in a way that will be meaningful to the individuals with whom you work.

A. Step One: Understand Basic Ideas of Appreciation

¹ Mike Robbins, *Focus on the Good Staff: The Power of Appreciation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 32.

² Jan Watson and Christine Lapointe, "Motivation through Recognition & Reward," *Review of Ophthalmology* 12 (May 16, 2005): 29-30.

1. Everyone Wants Appreciation that is Colorized

- FIRST, for appreciation to be effective, it must be individualized and delivered personally.
- SECOND, appreciation needs to be viewed as valuable to the recipient.
- THIRD, employees are more likely to “burn out” when they do not feel appreciated or emotionally supported by their supervisors.
- FOURTH, when leaders actively pursue communicating appreciation to their team members, the whole culture improves.

2. Everyone Wants Appreciation that is Personalized

WE ALL TEND TO COMMUNICATE TO OTHERS IN WAYS THAT ARE MOST MEANINGFUL TO US—we “speak our own language.” However, if the message is not the appreciation language of the employee, it may not mean to them what it would mean to you. That is why many employees are not encouraged when they receive a reward as part of the company's recognition plan—it doesn't speak in their preferred language of appreciation.

This process of miscommunication can be frustrating to both the sender and the recipient.

3. Everyone can Speak the Appreciation Language

B. Step Two: Beware of Pitfalls from Lack of Appreciation

Here are some clues that you can watch for, to help you know when those with whom you work may need a message of appreciation or encouragement:

1. Discouragement
2. Irritability and resistance
3. Increased Absenteeism or Tardiness
4. Cynicism and Sarcasm
5. Apathy and Passivity
6. Social Withdrawal
7. Negative Work Environment

C. Step Three: Visualizing the Return When Appreciation is Engaged

1. Staff Stay Around Longer
2. Staff Enjoy Their Jobs More
3. Staff Get Along at a Higher Level
4. Greater Customer Satisfaction

II. Part Two: The Language

A. Appreciation Language #1: Words of Affirmation

Words of Affirmation is the language that uses words to communicate a positive message to another person. When you speak this language, you are verbally affirming a positive characteristic about a person. As with all the languages of appreciation, there are many dialects. A dialect is a unique way to speak a particular language. Let's look at some of the ways to communicate words of appreciation.

1. How to Communicate Affirmation

a. Affirm their Accomplishments

Praise focuses on an achievement or accomplishment. So we tend to praise a colleague when they have done a quality job, or when they meet or exceed our expectations.

b. Affirm their Character

All of us appreciate positive character traits in those with whom we work—such traits as perseverance, courage, humility, self-discipline, compassion, forgiveness, honesty, integrity, patience, kindness, love, and unselfishness. It is likely that most of the people you work with display some of these virtues. The question is, *"Have you ever expressed appreciation for these character traits?"*

c. Affirm their Personality

Personality is our normal way of approaching life. There are numerous personality profiles that seek to help people identify both the positive and negative aspects of their own personality. If we understand our own personality patterns, we can learn to *"play to our strengths"* and minimize our weaknesses.

2. Where to Communicate Affirmation

- a. Personal, One-On-One
- b. Praise In Front Of Others
- c. Written Affirmation

3. The Problems and Shortcomings when Affirmation is forged

a. Pitfall #1: Hollow Praise

Words of praise can be encouraging to your workers, but they must be sincere. **IF THEY ARE EXPERIENCED AS BEING HOLLOW OR INSINCERE BY THE RECIPIENT, THEY WILL NOT ACCOMPLISH PURPOSE OF AFFIRMATION.**

b. Pitfall #2: Meaningless Time

B. Appreciation Language #2: Quality Time

Quality Time means giving the person your undivided attention. This is not talking about simply being in physical proximity to another person. Many of us work closely with colleagues all day long, but at the end of the day will honestly say, "I did not have any quality time with any of my colleagues today." How could anyone make that statement? Because the key element of quality time is not proximity but personal attention.

1. What is Quality Time?

a. Quality Conversation

Quality conversation means empathetic dialogue where two individuals are sharing their thoughts, feelings, and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context.

b. Shared Experiences

For some employees, sharing experiences with their colleagues is an important way for them to feel connected and encouraged.

c. Small Group Dialogue

Some people do not feel comfortable talking to their supervisor one-on-one. But in a small group where the supervisor is asking for ideas and suggestions, they feel less intimidated and more likely to share their thoughts. If the supervisor listens attentively and expresses appreciation for their openness, these individuals feel greatly appreciated.

d. Small Group Projects

2. Where do we do Quality Time

There are many settings in which managers and coworkers can express appreciation by speaking the language of *Quality Time*. There are too many numerous ways to spend quality time together but here are a few:

- Go to lunch together to talk about business issues or just for fun.
- Stop by, sit down in my office, and check in with me about how things are going.
- Come "hang out" with the team at the end of the day.
- Get together to watch sporting events.
- Go to dinner together with our spouses/significant others.
- Give me a call occasionally, just to chat.

3. The Pitfall and Shortcomings when Quality Time is phony

Sometimes all of us try to accomplish tasks by simply going through the motions. Unfortunately, this can include spending time with coworkers.

C. Appreciation Language #3: Acts of Service

Providing assistance to others is a powerful expression of appreciation, especially to the individual whose primary appreciation language is *Acts of Service*. Such acts of service will normally be viewed as beneficial. However, several strategies can make the process more effective:

1. What are Acts of Service

- a. Get Your Work Done First
- b. Check Your Attitude
- c. Ask Before You Help
- d. Serve Voluntarily
- e. Do It Their Way
- f. Complete What You Start

2. Where can Acts of Services Occur

Here are some specific actions supervisors and coworkers can do that may encourage others:

- Stay after hours to help me complete a project.
- Offer to do some menial task that will allow me to focus on higher priorities.
- Help me to get my computer to work more efficiently.
- Assist me in cleaning up equipment at the end of the day.
- Bring me or my team some food when we are working long hours to complete a project.
- Provide extra time for support staff to help me get caught up in my filing and paperwork.

3. The Problems and Shortcomings when Acts of Service are put-on

- a. Pitfall #1: Service with a Negative Attitude
- b. Pitfall #2: Disingenuous Assistance

D. Appreciation Language #4: Tangible Gifts

Giving the right gift to a person who appreciates tangible rewards can send a powerful message of thanks, appreciation, and encouragement. Conversely, giving a gift to someone who doesn't really appreciate gifts has little impact; the wrong gift can actually create an offense.

E. Appreciation Language #5: Physical Touch

It is needless to say that physical touch in the workplace can be problematic. In research conducted managers, supervisors, and workers repeatedly expressed concern about physical touch in the workplace. The question to ask is this: Is there a role for appropriate touch in work-oriented relationships. Some say yes, others no! Every library will need to determine the boundaries of using physical touch as an appreciation language.

III. Part Three: The Lesson Application

A. Apply the Concepts

By nature, we all tend to speak our own language of appreciation. If *Acts of Service* makes me feel appreciated, then I will be known as an acts of service person. I will pitch in and help my colleagues and am always willing to go the extra mile. If *Quality Time* makes me feel appreciated, then I will often engage my colleagues in conversation, inquiring of their well-being. If *Words of Affirmation* makes me feel appreciated, then you can expect that I will give words of affirmation to those with whom I work. If I appreciate *Tangible Gifts*, then I will likely be a gift giver. If a pat on the back or a high five energizes me and makes me feel appreciated, I will likely express my appreciation to others with *Physical Touch*.

Conversely, if I do what comes naturally, the language of appreciation that is least valued by me will seldom be spoken. If receiving gifts means little to me in terms of feeling appreciated, then I am likely to ignore this language of appreciation. It becomes for me a blind spot. I assume that since it has little value to me, it will be of little value to others. Thus, the coworkers for whom receiving gifts is their primary language of appreciation will feel unappreciated even though in my mind, I am freely expressing appreciation in one of the other languages. Understanding and accepting your team members' differences in how they feel appreciated and encouraged is critical to the success of the library. If an one doesn't fully grasp and implement this reality in how it relate to other colleagues, one will waste a lot of time and energy trying to encourage them in ways that have little or no impact.

1. BE AWARE THAT EVERYONE HAS AN APPRECIATION LANGUAGE

2. BE AWARE OF OTHER COWORKERS APPRECIATION LANGUAGE

If you find absolutely no interest among fellow employees but you would like to use the languages of appreciation concept to more effectively express appreciation to those with whom you work, here are three informal ways of discovering the primary appreciation language of your colleagues:

- a. Observe Their Behavior
- b. Observe What They Request of Others
- c. Listen To Their Complaints

3. BE AWARE OF POTENTIAL BLIND SPOTS

Supervisors and managers who have team members who are not working up to their potential, who create a negative work environment, and who leave the organization dissatisfied typically will not be as successful in their organization as those who have well-functioning and highly productive teams with long term team members. It is important to you and your career to pay attention to your least valued language of appreciation and how it impacts your relationships with your colleagues. By taking a few proactive steps, you can actually use this "blind spot" to your benefit to grow into a more effective manager.

- a. Realize that Everyone is Unique
- b. Be Sensitive to Least Favorite Appreciation Languages
- c. Accept Others Appreciation Language
- d. Plan to Show Appreciation

B. Avoid the Obstacles

The question is not, "*Do you appreciate your coworkers or those who work under your direction?*" The real question is, "*Do they feel appreciated?*" Research has led to the conclusion that there are thousands of people who work in what they consider to be a "*thankless environment.*" In many cases their managers and colleagues are unaware of these feelings.

If communicating appreciation and encouragement to those we work with was easy, then everyone in the company would be a happy camper. There would be no need for workshops. The truth is, there are challenges that get in the way of effectively expressing gratitude to our colleagues. Some are internal issues attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs. Other challenges are external and relate to corporate structures and procedures. These challenges need to be faced realistically, but they can be overcome. Here are some of the common challenges and suggestions on how to solve them as you seek to create a positive work climate.

- Challenge #1: Busyness
- Challenge #2: Communicating Appreciation is not Important for you Organization
- Challenge #3: Feeling Overwhelmed with Existing Responsibilities
- Challenge #4: Logistical issues that interfere with the process of sharing appreciation for others. Varying schedules, working on different projects, and non-matching vacations often make it difficult to express appreciation to certain coworkers.
- Challenge #5: Personal Discomfort with Appreciation

Conclusion:

I would be wrong if I was to claim that *Motivating by Appreciation* is an easy process for every individual and in every setting. This is clearly not the case. Not everyone was on board with the project. Some remained on the sidelines refusing to take part. But the majority of staff has embraced the languages. For some staff encouraging another staff has been a significant “growth-point.” We have learned that some work settings have characteristics that make communicating appreciation more difficult.

However, we also learned that it worked for DeSoto Parish Library. The challenge often required some creative thinking and problem solving, but the problems were not insurmountable. I believe it is worth the effort to engage those with whom you work closely in an effort to enhance the level of effectiveness in expressing appreciation to each other.

For More Information:

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