

Energizing People for Performance

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Review of “The Five Languages of Appreciation”

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Business owners, CEOs, managers, and supervisors desire better production from their direct reports and other people within their organizations. The ideas for providing motivation can be as varied as there are organizations with more than one employee. Should committing energies to get production out of an organization's human capital be the goal of an organization's leadership? While employees will always say yes to more pay if offered, they leave companies when they do not feel valued by management (Branham, 2012). Brené Brown says it is essential that an organization's leadership understands their team members and engages with them to establish more than just a transactional relationship; this will build trust and enhance collaboration, thus making organizations more effective and even collaborative (Brown, 2018). Part of building trust is establishing a culture where employees feel valued and appreciated. Employees who feel appreciated have a lower incidence of leaving a company, which reduces the significant expense of replacing a trained employee, which becomes more costly for the more experienced and higher position. Employee retention concerns companies worldwide (Allen & Vardaman, 2021). Gary Chapman and Paul White springboard from Chapman's earlier book "The 5 Love Languages" and apply it appropriately to the workplace (Chapman, 1992). "The 5 Languages of Appreciation in The Workplace" emphasizes that a company's workforce, regardless of whether they share similar or the same roles, is not a homogenous amalgamation that can all be motivated in the same way (Chapman & White, 2019).

The onus of conveying appreciation should not fall on the shoulders of a department manager, supervisor, or the HR employee retention team. Creating a culture of appreciation within an organization is the goal, but an organization's leadership must have buy-in to have a lasting impact on overall workplace culture. However, it must be perceived as sincere, or it will have the potential to have adverse effects. Understanding how our direct reports, co-workers,

peers, supervisors, and managers receive meaningful appreciation takes investment in getting to know them or simply through keen observation. The five languages of appreciation are Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Tangible Gifts, and Physical Touch. The last language may be a challenge to find appropriate ways to convey appreciation in that manner.

It is said that we tend to express our appreciation to others in the way we, my top language is words of affirmation, and with Individualization, Positivity, Woo, and Relator as my top four Clifton Strengths, I can be perceived as going over the top and being disingenuous when I am exhorting and encouraging others in my typical verbose and energetic manner. The book, however, relayed that this manner of appreciation can have an even more meaningful impact when time is taken to express it in a handwritten card or note. While I may have my appreciation bucket filled with encouraging words, it may be of less value to others. My appreciation language is Quality Time, so I find more meaningful value in Words of Affirmation during an intimate time with one or two people, like when my boss stops by to talk or takes me out for lunch. People may believe that because I have taught industry-related classes and have been the one to do news interviews for previous companies, I would enjoy being recognized in front of groups, but I would not. My boss is telling me why he appreciates me, which is why I feel valued by him.

Organizations seem stuck in the rut of using Tangible Gifts to express their “appreciation” for employees. Unfortunately, these are generally company-logoed items that, regardless of quality, are all the same or with little variation and have no thought for everyone receiving them. With organizations having increased budget concerns, tangible gifts may be one of the first expressions of appreciation cut from consideration due to expenses; however, when

factoring in the cost of turnover and employee replacement, utilizing tangible gifts as a part of employee retention strategies should not be overlooked.

When taking the MBA inventory, I had difficulty applying it to my current career. I have been in EMS rescue since 2005, the last fourteen years, I have been in helicopter medical rescue and transport. While I will help people at the drop of a hat, love mowing my neighbor's lawn, or shoveling snow from their driveway, Acts of Service were last on my MBA inventory because it did not translate to a practical application of our routine operations. However, it brought up memories of my time in telecom project management. I could never get assistance when I was overwhelmed with projects and working late into the night as a salaried employee. I was never given appreciation for getting huge projects done. It was the highest-income job I had ever had at the time, but I left because I did not feel appreciated.

The book is something I will read again and apply when I enter my next profession, and I have even recommended it to one of my undergraduate professors. It would be useful for an organization's leadership team to each read the book and take the inventory, utilizing the code on the back cover. The website shows a \$25 fee for the expanded version for each participant, which can be concerning for organizations with limited budgets. However, as a tool to improve organizational morale, build a positive culture, and reduce turnover, I believe it would be a wise investment for a leadership team.

Professor Blakney Video Response

Professor Blakney, I appreciate that you said we should be just as appreciative of people when they are leaving as when they are serving, working for us, or looking to recruit them. Just as people have different languages of appreciation that communicate value, they also have

unique lives and demands that pull on them and stress their lives. Communicating with appreciation for their time with your organization is valuable in conveying that they were more than just a tool or a commodity you used for your organization. My wife has a phrase she calls “The Art of showing up” that shows appreciation and has a meaningful impact on people’s lives. You had mentioned recognizing that a person you are working with may be in the hospital. My daughter had a lengthy hospitalization last year, and her manager and members of her workgroup took time to visit her. A few years back, a co-worker’s father died. While we did not know the father, our entire workgroup showed up for the funeral. It may be quality time; it just may be the decent human thing to do. “We’re not robots, we’re human beings” reminds me of a favorite poem of my wife and I which was read at our wedding.

"The Human Touch." by Spencer Michael Free.

'Tis the human touch
in this world that counts,
The touch of your hand and mine,
Which means far more
to the fainting heart
Than shelter and bread and wine.
For shelter is gone
when the night is o'er,
And bread lasts only a day.
But the touch of the hand
And the sound of the voice
Sing on in the soul always.

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