

# You Will Never Feel Appreciated

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Let me guess. Every now and then you don't feel appreciated. You have completed projects with spectacular results (or have at least made very laudable progress) and yet haven't heard an "attaboy" or "attagirl" in quite some time. Welcome to the club.

I sometimes feel the same way. Why is it that no one really appreciates my efforts? Why do only my occasional failures seem to get any attention at all? This feeling comes over everyone now and then. During my years as a recruiter, we would see a fair number of "unappreciated" candidates. Feeling unappreciated at work is a popular reason for making a job change. Unfortunately, entering the job market with a chip on your shoulder ("I'll show those guys...") is not a great way to achieve success or to gain the sense of appreciation you crave. So let me share this kernel of advice: *There is no such thing as being truly appreciated at work.*

## Recognizing Rewards

Human resources people spend hundreds of hours each year fine-tuning your company's reward systems (annual bonuses, stock incentives, and sometimes even a day off for a job well done). These programs look good on paper, and admittedly it does feel nice when you are on the receiving end. The problem with this is that recognition and the resulting motivation come only when management wants them to. By waiting for praise on management's terms, we're playing by the rules of someone else's game. Rather than being dependent on praise and rewards that will

never come regularly enough, we need to rearrange the rules so that we have more control over our own motivation.

Industries like biotechnology or nanotechnology are not havens for those who need to be continually stroked by management. In most companies, making people feel good falls second to getting things done. The pressure to show results leaves good management busy just keeping an eye on the ball. Therefore, our basic need to be recognized and appreciated at work means that we may need to develop internal reward systems to complement the external systems devised by our human resources colleagues. Winners in any endeavor drive themselves over the finish line by the use of internal recognition and rewards.

Money alone does not spark the performance of professional athletes as much as moving from 78% free-throws to 82% by the end of the season. That's an internal game played just to keep them in the zone.

## **Identifying Motivators**

An early industrial psychologist, Frederick Herzberg, wrote about the two factors that motivate workers. In *Work and the Nature of Man* (1), Herzberg describes the difference between what he calls “maintainers” and “satisfiers.” Maintainers are things such as salary, job security, fringe benefits, and company policies. Although maintainers have a number of positive effects (such as reducing complaints and building a congenial work atmosphere), they are short-term incentives rather than long-term motivators. I know you are thinking right now that a \$10,000 raise would really motivate you – but it has been proven that pay increases lead to only a short-term spike in performance. Besides, maintainers are outside of our control as employees.

Satisfiers, on the other hand, are those motivators that truly give long-term job satisfaction. They motivate us to go to work early in the morning or to stay late without looking around to see who notices. A good manager gears satisfiers individually to employees, knowing what satisfiers will motivate her team members to do a good job. For example, for a scientist a satisfier might be having a continual stream of fresh problems to solve or the proper mix of routine testing with new methods development. For a technical rep selling to academic labs, a satisfier might be having a couple of industrial accounts to call on as well.

### **Getting Control of Your Satisfiers**

Let's return to our original goal of breaking the Pavlovian habit of waiting for a pat on the back before feeling good about our work. Because satisfiers are internal rather than external things, they can be manipulated somewhat by you.

Do you know what makes you feel good about your work? It may take a bit of introspection, but you ought to have a rather good idea about those few things that really make your job worthwhile. To break the cycle of dependence on praise and external signs of appreciation, you have to recognize and appreciate your own accomplishments and derive your primary satisfaction from meeting and exceeding your personal standards. In his excellent book *Getting Things Done When You Are Not In Charge*, Geoffrey Bellman describes a number of places to look for rewards and appreciation other than from management. Here are my adaptations of those concepts:

**Look for the bigger picture . . .** Identify where you fit in and what you are contributing to, rather than place exclusive emphasis on the success and failure of your individual piece of a project or program.

**Find the real satisfaction . . .** that can come from helping your colleagues become more self-reliant. If you have a particular skill that others find valuable, try to coach more instead of just doing the work. Helping others learn, develop, and succeed is one way to feel good and to earn a great sense of appreciation.

**Become the unifying factor . . .** in getting other teams to work well with yours, helping to reduce turf wars.

**Build a network . . .** of people who trust and help you. Seek out people whose work is similar to yours and learn what their rewards are.

### **Improving Your Strategy**

From personal experience, I can add one more item to Bellman's list: Find a way to quantify the results of your work, and then strive toward bettering your own performance. Nothing can diminish the feeling of satisfaction that you'll gain from watching your daily or weekly improvement of basic skills. As when shooting free throws, there's an immense satisfaction at seeing an upward trend.

In basketball, tennis, or any other sport, if something is wrong with your game, you change your strategy. If you've found something missing from your job satisfaction lately, and if you are not feeling quite as appreciated as you need to feel, then this is the time to change your strategy. Kick your addiction to praise!

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**References:**

( 1 ) Frederick Herzberg, *Work and the Nature of Man* (World Publishing Company, Cleveland, OH, 1966). (2) Geoffrey Bellman, *Getting Things Done When You Are Not In Charge* (Berren-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1992

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