



Positive Feedback: What Employees Want and Need

Have you recently told an employee what a great job he/she is doing? Positive feedback has long been recognized as a critical element in high-performing workplaces.

Yet, many managers don't feel comfortable giving praise, saying that it takes too much time, feels insincere or "too soft", or just gets in the way of day-to-day activities. On the contrary, few actions will do more to build trust and boost morale than ongoing, sincere feedback of a positive nature.

Humans have an innate need to seek feedback on how we are doing. Without feedback, we tend to make up information--almost always negative--to fill the void. Giving positive feedback prevents destructive "information gaps," and strengthens relationships between employees and their supervisors. It also leads to improved work quality, increased accountability and a higher-performing work environment.

Know when and how to compliment

Positive feedback starts with knowing when and how to praise employees. Specifically, it involves recognizing and praising employees for specific behaviors and accomplishments that go beyond the everyday expectations of their jobs.

For example, praise employees when they:

- Turn a difficult customer into a promoter
- Develop or contribute significantly to another colleague's project
- Create a new process, product or approach
- Present an idea for doing something differently (even if the idea is not implemented)
- Do an exceptional job of influencing internally or externally
- Excel at a presentation
- Participate significantly in a community event on behalf of the company

Let employees know that you're paying attention and that you appreciate their efforts. Taking a few moments to express your appreciation can have a powerful impact on employees' self-esteem and their attitudes toward their work and the organization as a whole.

To maximize the effect, make your positive impact:

- **Immediate.** Give recognition as soon as possible after the event.
- **Specific.** State specifically what the person did that met or exceeded your expectations.
- **Impactful.** Explain how the event or behavior affected you, the team or the organization.
- **Encouraging.** Focus on the positive only. Be appreciative without mentioning other things that might need to change or be adjusted. These should be saved for times when you are giving constructive feedback.
- **Focused.** State how the performance or action was positive and contributed to success. This will help prevent other messages, often made up, from taking the employee off track.

Don't praise employees for showing up on time or doing the basics of their job.

Never give positive feedback unless you mean it. Insincere positive feedback will just make recipients wonder what your real agenda is or what you are trying to hide. And the next time you give legitimate praise it will have far less impact.

Positive feedback with Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y

The time has come to jettison the "sandwich" technique, whereby you say something positive, sneak in something you want the employee to do differently, and then finish with a positive. For years, this approach was used to soften the impact of critical feedback, and it worked reasonably well with Baby Boomer and Traditionalist workers.

Gen-Xers, however, quickly see through this strategy and openly question the hidden agenda behind the positive feedback. And the youngest generation, the Millennials (Gen-Y), are so accustomed to direct (and often brutal) feedback that they see no point in trying to sneak positive feedback into a constructive feedback conversation.

So keep your positive feedback positive, focus on specific events and behaviors that exceed your expectations, and let employees know how much you appreciate their efforts. You'll improve morale and enhance trust while encouraging higher levels of performance. And today's stressed-out employees will appreciate your efforts to meet their workplace needs.

Vistage speaker Holly G. Green is CEO of [The Human Factor, Inc.](#) and author of [More than a Minute](#). Previously she held positions as President of The Ken Blanchard Companies as well as LumMed, Inc., a biotech start up. Holly is known as someone who gets things done and has led turnarounds as well as hyper-growth organizations.

Average Reader Rating: ★★★★★ based on 5 Reader Reviews and Ratings

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★★★★★ So True - Bye Bye Sandwich, RIP Wednesday, July 22, 2009

Reviewer: Member [Marie Meoli](#) from Fullerton, California, United States -

Very relevant article that is certain to remind and instruct folks on how best to appeal and deal with the new workforce. In these challenging times, people/employees not only want the recognition, they truly need it... There's a lot of self doubt and uncertainty creeping around today's workforce so encouraging and demonstrating how to give positive feedback is a timely topic! thank you.

★★★★★ Most important - yet most underutilized culture builder Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Reviewer: Chr Candidate [John Marcus](#) from Saint Louis, Missouri,

CEO's often think their company's revolve around them. Success in any organization comes as a result of team success. The only way to have long-term team success is to freely give "atta-boys" out to employees, especially when you catch them in an act of doing something well. What gets rewarded, gets repeated. The cost to the company for offering frequent (but deserved) praise is nothing. The reward to the company could not be bought for lots of money. John Marcus

★★★★★ Cleal Concise and a good reminder Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Reviewer: Member [Bradley Van Dam](#) from Hollister, California, United

This article is spot on in that for whatever reason, showing appreciation is difficult for most people. It feels awkward at first but feels great afterward, Why the awkwardness isn't overcome by the good feeling is a mystery. Either way, this article was a good reminder for me to pay more attention to times when people are excelling. Building a bank of good will makes the difficult feedback easier to communicate and is more likely to be taken in a better light if a positive facet has been maintained.

★★★★★ Recognition is the key Saturday, July 18, 2009

Reviewer: Member [David Roberts](#)

This is an excellent article which describes in straight forward terms the art of great leadership. Leadership is about catching your people doing things right. The writer also recognises the stress which most employees feel and addresses one of the two key questions in all employees minds "How am I doing" The other question of course is "Where are we going"