

The Power of Praise and Recognition

As you read this article, mark the text for two things:

- 1. Underline evidence provided to back up the author's claim and summarize the evidence in the margin.*
- 2. Circle any clues you find that might help us determine who the intended audience of this article might be.*

Why do we need praise?

It's no secret that being praised often makes people feel good. Pride, pleasure and increased feelings of self-esteem are all common reactions to being paid a compliment or receiving positive feedback. This is because being praised triggers the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that helps control the reward and pleasure centres of the brain. As well as making us feel good, dopamine can also contribute to innovative thinking and creative problem-solving at work.

These positive effects, however, are relatively short-lived, and for praise to have an enduring impact on employee engagement, it needs to be offered regularly.

The impact of praise

Psychologists and researchers have long been fascinated by the effects of praise on workplace performance and behaviour. In 2004, the Gallup Organisation conducted a worldwide research project, surveying more than four million employees about the importance of praise and recognition.

Gallup concluded that employees who receive regular praise are more productive, engaged and more likely to stay with their organisation, than those who do not. The survey results also indicated that employees who are praised receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers, and even enjoy better health than employees who are not.

Meanwhile, The Carrot Principle presents the findings of a 10-year motivation study, in which more than 200,000 employees and managers were interviewed. In their analysis of the results, authors Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton, report that when managers are considered to be effective at 'recognising' their employees, they:

- have lower turnover rates than other managers
- achieve better organisational results
- are seen to be much stronger in goal-setting, communication, trust and accountability

In 2008, consultancy firm Towers Watson published the results of their Global Recognition Study, which reveals a strong positive correlation between manager recognition and employee engagement.

Offering praise and recognition costs nothing, but studies indicate that it can even be as effective as giving employees a financial reward. In 2008, strategy consultancy White Water Strategies reported that being praised can have the same impact on job satisfaction as being awarded a one per cent pay rise. Meanwhile, the Japanese National Institute for Psychological Sciences has investigated the neurological impact

of praise, discovering that being paid a compliment activates the same part of our brain as receiving cash!

Delivering praise

There is a great deal of research to suggest that praising employees at work can be beneficial. However, the way in which the praise is delivered has a significant bearing on its effectiveness. The Gallup Organisation has pointed out that only genuine achievements should be praised, and that empty words have little or no value.

World-renowned psychologist Carol Dweck has found that children who are praised for being inherently 'good' at something are less likely to take on new challenges than those who are praised for their approach to the task. When it comes to praising children, Dweck's advice is to 'focus on the processes they used - their strategies, effort or choices'. For managers, Dweck's findings highlight the value of constructive feedback; managers should be specific about which aspects of their team members' performance have particularly impressed them and why.

There's little doubt that praising and recognising the efforts and achievements of others can bring about some very positive results in the workplace. Being praised makes the recipient feel good about themselves and this can help to boost their performance. Praise provides the kind of positive experience or 'uplift' that can increase employees' morale, motivation and engagement, and renew their commitment to their manager and the organisation. For praise to have this kind of impact, however, it needs to be delivered effectively. Only genuine achievements should be praised, and managers should ensure their feedback is constructive and specific.

Questions

1. Why does praise make us feel better?
2. What can you infer about the author from the spellings of *recognised*, *centres*, and *organisation*?
3. This article makes an argument. What claim is it making?
4. What evidence does the article provide to back its claim?
5. Who do you think is the intended audience of this article? How do you know this?
6. What are some guidelines for delivering praise?