



Community of Christ

GREATER PACIFIC NORTHWEST USA MISSION CENTER

Effective Ways to Share Authentic Appreciation and Encouragement: A Leadership Challenge

Appreciation is something that is critical to healthy relationships. Personal worth is affirmed. Giftedness is acknowledged. In addition, contributions to the work of the community become blessings of giving and receiving. This is true everywhere—but doing so within our community of faith can be a special challenge.

For appreciation to be received, it must be authentic—not just a gesture, and not directed at the group as a whole only. People are often cynical about expressions of appreciation because of the question of motivation. Is it an easy way to say “thanks” and then check off the to-do list? Is it something done so that one is persuaded to do more or take on an additional task? Is it a gesture meant more to make the giver look good than to genuinely express thanks to the recipient?

How do we express appreciation to team members and volunteers that they will receive as authentic, genuine, and not just an empty gesture or even manipulation? Authenticity is expressed in relationship. It is respect for a person and the value they have to you and the community. Research says that people want to be seen for who they are and valued for the contributions and efforts they make.

Research also tells us that each of us gives and receives appreciation or encouragement in ways that are unique to our personality. Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. Paul White have developed an understanding of this that they call, “The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace.” These “languages” can be summarized as:

1. **Words of affirmation**—they must be true and specific to the person and their efforts
2. **Quality time**—time spent in being together in relationship
3. **Acts of service**—things you do for someone
4. **Tangible gifts**—these need to be specific to the interests of the individual
5. **Appropriate physical touch**—pat on the back, handshake, high five, fist bump, shoulder hug

These languages can be used to express both appreciation and encouragement. The difference between the two is time. Appreciation is expressed for the present or the past. However, encouragement is connected to the future. Both are important ways of affirming the worth of a person and their place in the community.



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Drs. Chapman and White say that if you want to communicate appreciation to others which is perceived as authentic, there are four core conditions that need to be met. Team members will feel valued when appreciation is communicated:

1. **Regularly**—What is “regularly?” It varies depending on the work setting, the frequency of interaction between co-workers, and the nature of the relationship. (However, “regularly” clearly implies more than once a year at an employee's performance review, or when someone receives the "Staff Member of the Month" award!)
2. **Utilizing the “language” and actions important to the recipient**—The key word is "recipient." Most of us tend to communicate appreciation to others through the actions that we value—like giving a verbal compliment or sending an email. However, not everyone feels appreciated in the same ways. Some people appreciate words of affirmation, while others are encouraged when someone helps them with a task. Spending time is another way to demonstrate support, like stopping by a colleague's office to see how they are doing.
3. **In a way that is personal and individualized**—While group-based recognition is a good start ("Way to go, team! Our client satisfaction ratings improved significantly last quarter."), if the appreciation doesn't relate to what the individual team member did to help achieve the goal, the communication will have no effect. Team members want to know that what they have done is valued and noticed.
4. **In a manner that is perceived as genuine**—If the communication of appreciation is not perceived as being genuine, nothing else really matters. Actions of recognition can appear inauthentic for a variety of reasons. Here are a few of the most common:
 - a) A person's tone of voice, posture, or facial expressions don't seem to match what they are saying
 - b) How a person relates to you in front of others differs from how they interact with you privately
 - c) The individual has a history of "saying one thing and doing another"
 - d) There is an overall question of the motivation of the deliverer. Do they have an ulterior motive?

See www.appreciationatwork.com. This website contains more information about appreciation and encouragement, including many blog articles with helpful bits of information. While it is aimed at a work or team environment, it is relatable to team situations and volunteers.