

Relationships, Leaderships Are Built With Gratitude

Over the past decade a survey of more than a million employees in countries around the world, and universally one of the lowest scoring items on just about every engagement survey was “feeling appreciated for my work”. From years of research on gratitude, scores of successful CEOs why we are so bad at showing gratitude.

The leaders who are practitioners of gratitude, many of them run billion-dollar enterprises. These leaders will tell you how gratitude has helped them transform their businesses and their lives, and they wanted to let other leaders know how essential it is to be grateful to those in their care.

Most successful leaders know that showing gratitude to their teams is championed as an essential part of good management. And yet when their people are interviewed, we hear employees say they feel unappreciated. Some of them claim they actually feel under assault. Why?

Research shows that there is a staggering **gratitude deficit** in the work world and daily living. In fact, 81 percent of working adults say they would work harder if their boss were more grateful for their work, and a whopping 96 percent of men and 94 percent of women acknowledge that a boss who expresses gratitude is more likely to be successful.

Why is there a chasm between knowing that gratitude works and the failure of so many leaders to actually practice it...or do it well?

The retired CEO Alan Mulally, the man who saved Ford Motor Company. said that leadership “is about people. “You either understand that on a really fundamental level, or you don’t. And if you do, you create an environment where people know what the plan is, what the status is, and areas that need special attention. Then it’s all about appreciating them, respecting them, and thanking them at every step of the way

After his retirement as chairman and CEO of American Express, Ken Chenault said, “This view of ‘I want to be very stingy with gratitude’ gets confused to mean I’m not being demanding. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. You can be very demanding and bestow gratitude very often and be authentic.”

“A quirk of many successful people is they like to show they are the smartest person in the room. They are often happy to take all the help they can get without giving credit to others.”
Hubert Joly

A high-performance leader, who maintained outstanding results year over year. have higher than average ratings in recognition/appreciation/gratitude.

3 Steps to Becoming a More Grateful Leader

What are some of effective approaches for showing gratitude used by the leaders? You will find that real leader adopted the following behaviors—among others—their people found them authentic and motivating, and there was usually a corresponding uptick in morale and engagement:

1. Walk in Their Shoes.

We were amazed at how little most leaders knew about the challenges their people were wrestling with in their daily work. Leaders who develop empathy for others are great enablers of authentic gratitude.

An interesting show “Undercover Boss” show company leader spends a full day working with an employee whose job requires them to interact directly with customers. One leader told us about working housekeeping for a full day—punching in, giving up his cell phone, putting on the uniform, and cleaning bathrooms. It gave him an entirely new understanding of what it means to do that very difficult job and made future appreciation to those staff members very real and meaningful. And, as an added benefit, it also gave him a few practical ideas that could help make the housekeeping staff’s jobs easier and more efficient.

2. Look for Small Wins.

Research shows that of all things that can boost motivation during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. Whether people are trying to solve a major scientific mystery or simply produce a high-quality product or service, even a small win can make all the difference in how they feel and perform. The job, as leaders, is to express regular gratitude for that incremental progress, and not save our thanks for big wins alone.

3. Tailor to the Individual.

Again, research has found each person appreciates different expressions of gratitude. For instance, someone driven by autonomy and excelling might feel most valued when given a chance to work independently on an important project, while someone who is more motivated by teamwork and friendship would more likely feel more recognized when given a public celebration in appreciation of a big win.

There is a story of a manager gather her group of seven direct reports and thank each, one at a time, for his or her work on a project. To a woman with a more self-assured nature, the leader said, “Cindy, I want to thank you for getting the momentum going with the analysis. We needed your insights and your direction, and this whole thing wouldn’t have gotten off the ground without that pre-work,”

To a more laid-back young man she said, “Jared, you kept the peace in the team when things got crazy stressful. We needed your steadying influence.” Her specific words made the moment of gratitude so much more memorable as the team realized she had noticed each of them and appreciated the specific work they had contributed.

“It’s not joy that makes us grateful,” she summed up, “it’s gratitude that makes us joyful.” Brene Brown

As leaders, listen and hear this, the bottom line is that making human connections is our job as leaders, and we found helping others feel valued and providing a little boost of joy at what they do can make a huge difference.