

The Power of Appreciation

By: Tina Noe, Danville South Elementary

Contact: tnoe@danville.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Throughout my career I have had a great deal of pride for the type of culture I have created in my building. I know that building strong relationships and valuing the efforts of your staff can be two of the most highly effective leadership strategies. I have worked to create an environment where we work hard, but also have fun. An environment where my staff feel I'm approachable and that I appreciate their hard work and effort. Over the years, I felt as though writing notes of appreciation or sharing my gratitude were a strength. It wasn't until I recently started keeping a daily hand written schedule that I noticed I might not be as free with my gratitude as I thought. The daily schedule I started keeping included my daily appointments, a "to do" list, a notes section for upcoming professional development training, a section for "celebrations/thank you's" and then a reflection/highlights of the day. The daily schedule in and of itself increased my daily productivity and efficiency. Even though I kept a google calendar of my appointments, there was something about keeping my schedule in this format that made my time more focused. I had a goal of writing down at least two names a week of people I would send a thank you note to. I wanted the note to be meaningful and authentic. Coming up with situations in which to thank someone was easy, however, I quickly realized that by writing these names and scenarios down, I was often thanking the same small group of individuals. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to develop a systematic approach to sharing genuine appreciation with my all of my staff.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if I am intentional with my gratitude, will each staff member feel more appreciated and valued at the end of the school year? Will job satisfaction increase?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings, I first created a daily schedule which included a section to record two or more people per week that I would write a hand written note of appreciation. I then created a binder that included a page for each staff member. A dated post-it note was placed on the page designated for each staff member each time a thank you note had been given. This visual allowed for me to quickly deduce who is receiving thanks and who still needs to receive thanks.

Throughout my action research project, I was able to keep tabs on who had not received any hand written notes and I could seek out opportunities to find genuine and authentic opportunities to share my gratitude. At the conclusion of the project, I counted the number of notes that were given to each staff member and totaled the number for an overall result of 145 handwritten notes from August 2016-March 2017. This was an average of 4 to 5 notes per person.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data three important things I learned include:

- This process forced me to be intentional in looking for praise opportunities
- Having a section on my daily schedule made me more likely to write a note of appreciation.
- This process has made me feel more genuine gratitude for the countless things my staff does for our building and our students.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

It is often said, that a person who feels appreciated will often do more than is expected. According to Psychology Today, “research on employee engagement examines the relationships among motivation, money, and recognition, and finds, not entirely surprisingly, that how you feel is often more important than what you earn.” In the world of education, most teachers and administrators did not get into this line of work because of the money, they did it to make a difference. Since it is not a field where we can increase compensation for being a valuable employee, then at the very minimum, we should ensure they know they are appreciated for all that they contribute to our school and our students.

Josh Bersin from Forbes Magazine states “the results are really astounding: organizations that give regular thanks to their employees far out perform those that don't.” I know that from personal experience, when I receive praise or recognition from my boss, it gives me the lift I need to get me through just about anything. I can live off the compliment for months. As a leader, I want to be certain to give my staff that same “lift.” Although I sent regular emails throughout the year thanking individual staff members, I found that most prefer a handwritten note. It says, I was worth the time and effort. Many of my staff members keep the notes I have written them. Some have them on their bulletin boards near their computers. A personal touch helps in delivering the message that you are valued.

References:

Lipman, Victor (2013, June 13) New Employee Study Shows Recognition Matters More Than Money. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mind-the-manager/201306/new-employee-study-shows-recognition-matters-more-money>

Bersin, Josh (2012, June 13) New Research Unlocks the Secret of Employee Recognition. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2012/06/13/new-research-unlocks-the-secret-of-employee-recognition/>

Brooks, Chad (2016, July 20) Why Employees Value Appreciation Over Bonuses. Retrieved from <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9252-employee-appreciation.html>