

Expressing Appreciation to Your Team Members--Part 1

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Are you familiar with Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, published in 1992? If so, please keep reading.

If you're not familiar with the concepts contained in that book, then you have even more reason to keep reading! You'll learn something that will help you not only at work but also at home.

"What happens to love after the wedding?" That's how Gary Chapman started his insightful book published twenty years ago. After his many years of marriage counseling, Chapman concluded that all of us tend to express our love in one of five different "languages," as different as Chinese is from English.

I've recommended the concepts in the book to many of my clients, believing that team members respond well to what Chapman calls "words of appreciation." Unfortunately, Chapman's focus on "love" sometimes is not easily translated for use in the workplace. I've wished for years that Gary Chapman would revise his book (or publish another one) to focus on expressing appreciation in the workplace.

Well, my wish has been granted! Chapman collaborated with Paul White, a psychologist and business consultant, to produce *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*. Now I have a great resource to share with clients.

Although team members will tell you they always welcome more money, research has shown that the number one factor in job satisfaction is whether the individual feels appreciated for his or her work.

Do you realize that 2/3 of individuals who voluntarily resign their jobs do so because they don't feel valued? You may deeply appreciate the individuals under your authority, but do they know it, sense it, feel it? You may try to express your appreciation often, but if you speak a different "appreciation language" than Mary or Bill does, they'll never know you care!

What are those five "appreciation languages"? Here is an overview/summary of each.

Words of Affirmation. You can use words, both oral and written, to affirm and encourage your colleagues. Your unsolicited compliments may include praise for accomplishments, affirmation of character, and recognition of positive personality traits. To be appreciated, your accolades must be genuine and never offered to manipulate the person. Your words are free, but they may be of huge value to the recipient!

Quality Time. Some people value your undivided attention, typically in person. You create a safe space for the individual to share accomplishments, suggestions, frustrations, and other feelings. Your active listening includes eye contact, observing body language, inviting feelings as well as thoughts, and especially not attending to other things (such as looking at your computer or phone, interrupting, or changing the topic to your agenda).

Acts of Service. Some individuals appreciate your very practical help in accomplishing tasks. You offer your services voluntarily and with a pleasant, encouraging attitude. You make sure the person genuinely wants your help (he or she may prefer to perform the work alone), you assist in the way he or she prefers (that is, you don't take over), and you are sure to complete what you start.

Tangible gifts. It's the thoughtfulness and effort behind a tangible gift that some individuals value. An appropriate gift signals that you understand his or her preferences, you thought appreciatively of the person when not in his or her presence, and you care for and appreciate each person uniquely. The key with this language is in knowing what the person values; delivering something he or she will truly appreciate. Perfunctory gifts or gifts given as part of an organization-wide program do not represent the personal attention required in speaking this language.

Physical touch. Although this is an important language in personal relationships, research has indicated that it is less relevant in working relationships and can, in some cases, be problematic. Though some workplace touching is considered acceptable (shaking hands, "high five" celebrations, or a congratulatory pat on the back), some individuals are very uncomfortable with any kind of touch. Further, the potential for abuse and other inappropriate contact exists. However, not touching one another at all often leads to a cold, impersonal environment.

I'll share additional information about your use of these "appreciation languages" in my next article. For more immediate information, look at www.appreciationatwork.com and www.drpaulwhite.com.