

WORK THOUGHTS

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Make a Difference this Summer

Louisiana summers are famous for their heat and humidity. For working people, it is a good time to experience knowing that what we do really matters. Work can be demanding when the weather is light and easy, but during a Louisiana summer, we can always use a lift.

Psychologists call the regular expression of genuinely experiencing the value of another's behavior the language of *ongoing regard*. Universally, individuals from two to 92 seek out the experience.

What better way to feel lifted than to believe that what you do and how you do it makes a difference? Perhaps there is someone in your circle of influence who you admire or appreciate but seldom or never recognize.

To most effectively and powerfully communicate *ongoing regard* at work (and at home), psychologists recommend these strategies:

Directness. Instead of speaking generally to everyone in a group about how much a person's contribution is appreciated (almost as if the person is not in the room), appreciation works best when delivered directly to the person in front of others using second person pronouns. "Mark, I appreciate that *you* thought to include all the new employees." The message and *the eye contact* are directed toward the individual—not toward the group.

Specificity. The best feedback is detailed, personal, and specific. "You did a great job" is vague and usually more about the deliverer's good feeling than about the recipient's actual behavior. It takes more effort to deliver **specific, detailed, and personal communications**, but the payoff is life-changing and lasting. Saying something as simple as "Your last example was the most helpful to me and one I had never thought of" actually sings compared to the formulaic "You were great."

Nonattributing. Notice when your co-worker says something you find to be clever and insightful, you might think, "*That* is so clever!" And then without realizing it, you turn it into "*She* is so clever!" The initial experience of being intrigued and entertained becomes something about your co-worker (Now *she* is that way.) Telling her may elicit "Well, I'm glad *you* think so," and it characterizes the speaker's experience rather than the person being appreciated. Better to **give authentic recognition of specific behavior** and risk being real and original.

Finally, *ongoing regard* is not praise. Praise easily leads to discouragement, because it fortifies the mistaken concept that unless praise is received, the person's contributions have little value. *Ongoing regard* is extended for the purpose of informing others about our experience of them. It fortifies strengths and supports the concept that **it is we ourselves who make the difference.**

For speakers and listeners alike, the practice of communicating *ongoing regard* benefits the workplace. For more information about *ongoing regard* and fortifying employee strengths, please contact **Performance** Employee Assistance and Business Services at 337-436-9533.



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