



Coaching for Leadership *focus*

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF LEADERS AND PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE.

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The Power of Praise

Richard C. Huseman, Ph.D.— Executive Coach

Our need for approval and appreciation is as essential to living as air, water and food. As a leader, one of the most important things you can do is to help your people feel better about their work and about themselves. Praise is one of the best tools you can use to motivate your team to higher levels of performance.

HUMAN NEEDS

Our basic human needs fall into two major categories:

- Primary needs include food, water, air, shelter and protection.
- Secondary needs include acceptance, friendship, approval, self-esteem, etc.



For the vast majority of us, we are fortunate enough to have our primary needs satisfied. We have a comfortable bed to sleep in at night. There is still plenty of air to breathe and water to drink (for now). Most of us have the luxury of being able to eat at least three meals a day. However, once our primary needs are met, our secondary needs take center stage.

But for a moment, let's consider a scenario where someone is lacking in one of their primary needs... food. It would not take long before this individual began manifesting symptoms from their lack of food. Over time, they would lose weight and strength. Their lack of proper nutrition would lead to a weakened immune system making them more prone to illness. Their overall well-being would decline, both physically and mentally.

Likewise, when we fail to receive or maintain our secondary needs (acceptance, approval, belonging, self esteem, etc.), there are also manifestations of this lack. We start to exhibit symptoms of stress, depression and/or frustration. In some cases, the negative emotional reactions to the deficiency in our secondary needs results in physical illness. Just as with our primary needs, if our secondary needs are not sufficiently met, our



overall well-being begins to decline, both physically and mentally.

We need our daily bread and we also need our daily praise. We crave the recognition and acceptance found in praise just like we crave our favorite culinary vice. Unfortunately, while we might have the opportunity to feed ourselves when we are hungry for food, most of us go hungry for praise for days and weeks on end.

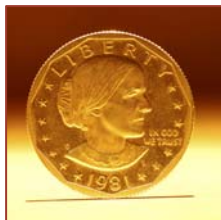
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Our need for approval and appreciation is as essential to our existence as air, water and food.

A few years ago, a young man in Wisconsin won the state lottery. He became 121 million dollars richer overnight. Unlike most winners, he did not immediately quit his job. He was a teacher, which earned him 30,000 dollars a year.

When he was questioned by reporters as to why he didn't quit his job, he told them how he kept a collection of "Thank You" letters from his former students. He said that nothing made him feel as good as when he was able to add a new letter to his cherished collection. He said to reporters, "You may think I'm crazy, but you can't replace those letters of appreciation with any amount of money."

Now, you might be thinking, "Okay, that's sweet, but I still wouldn't mind winning the lottery, too." Well, you are, in fact, richer than you know. You have a reservoir of unlimited "inner" wealth that you can share with all you meet without ever worrying about depleting its source. It is a currency that money cannot buy and you can spend it freely. What is this internal currency? **The Golden Coin of Praise.** Every encounter you have with another human being offers you the opportunity to unleash the power of praise, but it is especially valuable for leaders to utilize with those who work for them.

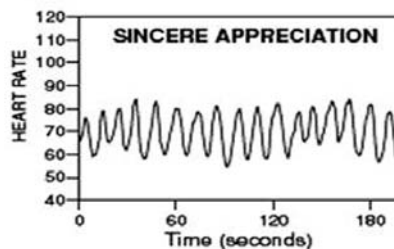
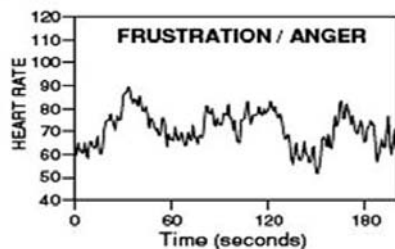


THE POWER OF PRAISE

Why is praise so powerful? Praise makes people feel appreciated. The fundamental power of praise comes from the fact that it affects both the brain and the heart.

The Institute of HeartMath has been researching the connection between the brain and the heart for over 15 years. Among their findings is that the heart and brain actually work symbiotically together to either enhance our overall well-being or detract from it.

The first of the two graphs below illustrate how feelings of frustration/anger can affect the heart rate. The second graph shows how sincere praise results in appreciation that can positively affect the heart rate. As you can see, sincere appreciation has a far more



Richard C. Huseman, Ph.D.

Dick Huseman is an executive coach and professional speaker. He is the founder and CEO of Executive Development & Education, an executive and performance coaching firm which specializes in coaching for hospitals and other health care organizations. Dick has authored 13 books including **The Leader as Coach: How to Coach a Winning Team** and **The Physician as Coach: The Awakening.**

assuasive and calming effect on the heart rate of the test subjects. Offering sincere praise and appreciation has been proven to actually improve heart health over time.

But in addition to being good for the hearts of those you lead, praise and appreciation also have a direct impact on cognitive functions. In another aspect of their research, the scientists at HeartMath performed an experiment whereby a number of subjects were put through cognitive tests both during a state of agitation and during a state of relaxation (or "coherence"). The results showed that when people were agitated, they could not think as clearly as when they were calm and relaxed. This makes intuitive sense, as well. When do you do your best thinking – during times of stress or during moments of peace?

Sustained positive attitude has been correlated with numerous organizational benefits including cognitive flexibility, innovative problem solving, improved decision making, creativity, and overall job performance.

- Staw, et. al.
Organizational Science

If you do your best thinking during moments of peace, then it is a good bet that the people you lead do, too. People who work in high stress environments are not able to tap into their best problem-solving skills or creativity as those who work in lower stress environments. The brain and heart just don't function as well when they are in a state of agitation.

As a leader, you can offset the stress of your work environment by praising your people. Tell them how their particular skill set augments the productivity of the team. Commend them on how their positive attitude makes things run more smoothly. Praise them for how well their best attributes make them both an asset to you and the organization. Give the praise in a way that helps them "wire" the praise into their brains and hearts. Praise is the key to an organizational culture where people feel empowered to make good things happen. ✂

FOCUSING PRAISE



Personalize: Always attempt to say something unique, original, and appropriate that distinguishes your recipient from all others.

Recognize: Seek out good performance and desired behavior. Identify specific strengths and positives through deliberate, focused awareness.

Analyze: Before you praise, analyze your target. Tailor your praise to fit your recipient. As you praise, analyze any reaction – positive or negative.

Improvise: Improvise or adjust your praise based on the feedback you are getting.

Specify: Be specific! Avoid generalities and vague, trite phrases.

Express: Exercise your right to express praise. Make it your conscious, daily habit to look for the good in others and give voice to your discoveries.

PRAISE

helps people feel validated.

