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## **The Appreciation Principle**

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How do we encourage people to do their best? The concept of motivation includes the carrot and the stick. The carrot is hope and expectation of good results, the stick is avoidance of punishment. Here is an approach to motivating people based on appreciation.

Think of a time that you were really enjoying your job. The chances are very high that what made you appreciate that particular job was less the actual work you did and more the kind of relationships you had at work. Often work that may seem tedious or uninteresting becomes exciting because of the people you work with.

People are motivated by appreciation. We want to believe we make a difference and that people appreciate what we do. Over the past twenty years, a new approach to counseling and to organizational psychology has emerged. In counseling we call it Solution-Focused Therapy, and in business we call it Appreciative Interviewing.

What we realized is that people are much more excited by positive forces and potentials than they are at the prospect of correcting mistakes. We found to our surprise and satisfaction that when we focused on what people do right, the things they do wrong usually do not require correction. Rather, the “wrong” things just drop out.

There are two general categories of questions. Exceptional times questions and Goal questions.

### **Exception questions:**

- Think of times when you showed warmth and support for a co-worker. How did it help you to show that?
- Think of times when you were pleased or proud to work where you work. Tell someone about that time. How do you feel when you talk about that?
- Recall a time when you handled a difficult co-worker, or when you watched someone handle a difficult situation. How did that happen? How did you feel?

These questions help a person appreciate times of excellence. When we think of times when we were at our best, it is only natural to want to do more of that. So as you counsel with people about high performance, help them appreciate the times when they were doing well. Ask them how they did it. Think with them about how they could do that again.

### **Goal questions:**

- If you came to work one day and the job had become significantly better how would you know?
- If you could improve the job in some small way, what would that be?
- If you had a better way to cope with difficulties on the job, how would that help?

The idea behind the goal questions is to help people think about and begin to set useful goals for themselves. Goals help us to do better, they help us perform at higher levels. In business, goal setting has been shown over and over to produce better results than making demands or challenging people. When a person sets a goal for himself or herself, there is much more motivation and desire to accomplish that.

**Helping us to be our best:**

If we are to invite people to be and do their best, we will achieve more by appreciating what is already right, by talking about goals/solutions and not about problems, and about making progress slowly. As we make progress, we will be well off if we constantly talk about and discuss the Exceptions or times when we are doing better than usual, and about Goals or Solutions.

So this is not a one-time change in our interviewing; it is a permanent change. It represents a new and healthier way of looking at ourselves, our co-workers, and our jobs.