



How Is Your Week Going So Far?

**PRAISE
MATTERS JUST
AS MUCH AS
MONEY.**

KATE MATSUDAIRA

I have to say, this week I am walking on sunshine. I'm getting a lot done and feeling really good while getting it all done. Which is pretty surprising, since earlier this week, I felt completely overwhelmed and a little defeated.

It is getting close to the end of the year, and with the holidays fast approaching, I was feeling overwhelmed by the large amount of work on my plate (both at home and at the office). Normally, this time of year would make me excited—I love Christmas and I am working on a lot of interesting projects; but instead of feeling pumped, every new task added to the list just made me feel more and more tired. Less and less excited. More and more overwhelmed.

But then something kind of amazing happened. And it was amazing because it was so small. I got to work, and shortly thereafter, I received an email highlighting some recent wins that came out of work I'd just done.

In fact, the message included this day-maker:

"Amazing job on the presentation!!!!!!!"

Oh yeah, that's seven exclamation points. :)

Ever wondered how to make your team more productive, more excited, and more motivated? It's really



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simple. It's so ridiculously simple.

Seven exclamation points completely changed the trajectory of my week.

You'd better believe my spirits were lifted and I kept working even harder after hearing that my work was not only appreciated, but that it also helped us achieve some goals.

Why did this work?

Because praise is one of the most meaningful ways to connect with the people on your team and motivate them to do more amazing work.

Nobody comes to work to do a bad job. Most of us are doing our best.

Even so, it's rare that we hear how our work is being received. We assume if we hear nothing that it means we are not in trouble, which is good. But it's not great.

A Gallup study found that more than two-thirds of employees do not receive any praise in a given week.

Which is surprising, given the research that shows getting "praise or recognition for good work" increases revenue and productivity 10 to 20 percent and that those feeling unrecognized are three times more likely to quit in the next year.

PRAISE IS HARD

Giving praise is hard. It can be awkward. It can feel unnecessary.

You might think, "My team already knows I think the work they do is awesome."

And you know what? You might be right. They might already know you appreciate them. But that doesn't

counteract their need to hear that you still think they are awesome.

It's not just the knowledge that your boss values you and your work that matters. Hearing it, out loud, for specific projects is what really matters. It is what sustains people. It is what motivates them.

Hearing praise releases oxytocin in our brains, a hormone that fuels trust and bonding. Simply put, hearing how much our work is appreciated makes us want to do more to repeat that feeling by pleasing the people we work with.

In fact, when I think about my past, one of my biggest motivations for being amazing in previous roles was being recognized for being amazing.

The recognition and approval I received from my leaders and peers were just as important as the raises and promotions I received for being great at my job. Praise matters just as much as money.

So, how do you do it right?

HOW TO PRAISE YOUR TEAM EFFECTIVELY

Valuable praise has the same three elements. If you add these together, the praise you're giving will be meaningful and motivating to your team.

It's like a super-simple math equation for motivation: to be effective, praise must be frequent, specific, and strategic.

Frequent

When you don't praise your team regularly, they don't know where they stand with you. They may make assumptions based on limited information such as your demeanor in a

meeting or a face you made in passing. When your team has little to go on (or they hear from you only when things are wrong), they don't have enough information to know you (secretly) appreciate their work.

Never forget that as a manager, your opinion matters to your team and they are constantly looking to you for information about their status.

Plus, negative comments last a lot longer in our brains than positive ones. This is why frequent praise matters.

It has been said that it takes six positive interactions to overcome one negative interaction—keep that in mind, especially if you're a hard-driving manager who demands the best. Make sure your team hears more of the good than the bad.

Specific

How many emails have you gotten with a “Thanks!” or “Good job” tacked onto the end of it? It doesn't quite have the enthusiastic effect the sender probably meant for it to have.

As a manager, when you praise your team, you need to tell them *exactly* what you liked in their work in order for it to have any value to them. Was it the way they commented their code? Did they give a detailed, efficient, and prompt answer in a support question? Were they able to take control of a bad situation and get everyone quickly working toward a good solution?

If you acknowledge specifically what you liked about what they did, they will know that you really paid attention and they'll know exactly what to do to be praised again.

Researchers have found that the highest driver

What you
reward
and
recogn-
ize is
what you get.

of work engagement is whether workers feel their managers are genuinely interested in them and their well-being. Think about how many times in your own career you've said things to yourself like, "I don't think they even notice what I do."

Be clear about praising specific work that you're grateful for or that has had a big impact. This will go a long way toward fighting burnout and building an amazingly motivated team (especially if you take the time to look for unsung and overlooked heroes on projects).

Strategic

Are you convinced praise is a good thing? Well, it gets better. You can actually use praise to develop your people and build a more amazing team.

To do this, choose a skill you want each team member to add or improve on. Work on this with each person, and any time you see improvement or good work, praise the person specifically for it.

You will see that person light up and keep getting better until they reach the level you want. Occasionally praising the things that you know someone has always been good at will also keep that person from feeling like no one notices his or her ongoing hard work.

What you reward and recognize is what you get. If you don't recognize anything, the bar will lower to see what gets noticed (or what people can get away with). When you do praise and reward your team, you raise the bar based on what gets praised.

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CAN YOU BE THE MANAGER YOU ALWAYS WISHED YOU'D HAD?

None of us hears “thank you” or “awesome job” enough at work.

Being the person who praises other people is an amazing person to be, especially when you follow this formula for making your praise ridiculously effective.

What could you accomplish if you had the best team in your company? Imagine what you could do if you had a team that was so successful and so motivated that you could take a long vacation without worrying about what was going on at the office.

Stop thinking about it, and start doing. Set a reminder on your calendar to give more praise every week.

Kate Matsudaira is an experienced technology leader. She worked in big companies such as Microsoft and Amazon and three successful startups (Decide acquired by eBay, Moz, and Delve Networks acquired by Limelight) before starting her own company, Popforms (<https://popforms.com/>), which was acquired by Safari Books. Having spent her early career as a software engineer, she is deeply technical and has done leading work on distributed systems, cloud computing, and

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