

The Appreciated Employee

By Jennifer Stroupe, CPO

Employees are the most important asset in any optometric practice. What if you could get your employees to do more than is expected of them every day? What would this mean for the productivity of your office, the office morale, and the individual employee? What if this technique cost you nothing and every manager has the capability to use this technique to ignite great change? Appreciation is a simple, yet a powerful tool, in a manager's toolbox. Learning the steps to appreciation and how to implement them will affect the office in a positive way

According to the English Oxford dictionary, appreciation is “the recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something.” (1) Let's start with recognition, which is the action or process of recognizing. **It** is an action word and requires you to perform a task. This is where we falter. For example, work gets busy. You see a bright spot during the day, but you get busy and forget. This cycle repeats itself daily, but if you would just stop and look around, you could find "bright spots" in every employee, every day. The second part of the definition is enjoyment. This is the part that we often want to rush through or overlook. Live in the moment of enjoyment. Enjoy the moments when you are appreciating your staff. Enjoy the rewards that come from appreciation. Lastly, enjoy the act of affecting others in a positive way. So how do you start and what do you do?

Step One Learn

Listen; as employees talk to you and to each other. Listen to them interact with patients and other staff. Employees love to share stories about their personal lives, their accomplishments outside of work and their dreams. When you are learning about your employees you may learn that one has a talent or interest she could

explore within your office. For example, Laci is a self-taught photographer. She takes beautiful pictures. One day she was showing her work to the staff. The manager stopped to learn about her work and then asked her if she would be interested in taking pictures of frames for the office social media. This one act of learning about an employee leads into the employee using their talents as a photographer in the office setting. So how do you organize your learning?

Start by writing down every employee's name and listing all the things you enjoy about each one of them. Build on the list by talking to each employee daily. Write down personal stories about their family, strengths at their jobs, and accomplishments. After you have learned each employee's strengths and talents, engage with the employees.

Step Two Engage

After making your list, plan to give specific in the moment feedback; leaving a note on an employee's desk about successfully selling glasses to a patient who never buys their glasses from the practice. Do this until it becomes a habit. "I appreciate you" seems so easy and so simple, but the rewards are huge. Hearing positive words come from a manager about their performance breeds joy, confidence, and increased productivity in the employee. A Global Force survey says 69% of employees would work harder if they felt their efforts were better recognized. (2) A happy employee affects the entire office. The patients will notice the employee's joy.

When you appreciate an employee for who they are, you build a bond of trust with that employee. 50% of employees believe that being thanked by a



manager not only improved their relationship but also built trust with management. (3) Employees who feel appreciated will always do more than expected. The Department of Labor study found that 64% of employees leave a company because they didn't feel appreciated or valued. For example, an employee wrote a note to each patient and thanked them for coming to their practice that week. The manager rewarded the employee for her efforts with a gift card. Other employees saw her efforts and began to do the same. Patients were responding with notes of their own. Think how one simple note of appreciation affected the patients, employees and the office morale. This small example leads us to the next step of teaching. Now that you have engaged with your employees teach them to engage with each other.

Step Three Teach

In your weekly meetings, ask employees if they would like to share a bright spot in their week. Going back to the earlier example about the employee who wrote notes to patients, this employee received a note back from a patient and shared it in the morning meeting. The patients not only thanked the employee for the note but recognized others who had made her visit enjoyable. This changed the entire office morale for the day. Employees love to share their success with others. Ask the employee if there was anyone in the office who contributed to their success. Appreciate them for working as a team and reward their efforts. The rewards can be as simple as a team lunch or a happy hour.

Build an appreciation toolbox. Start by asking staff for input on the rewards they would like to receive. Gift cards, happy hours, leaving extra early one day, or team lunches are all great things to have in your toolbox. Think of ways to build an appreciated staff, but it all starts at the top.



Results

You have learned all about your staff, acted, and taught your staff to appreciate others. Now, what results should you expect? What happens when your boss tells you "good job?" How does it make you feel? Think about your experiences with these situations. Appreciation will deliver results every time. Some results affect the individual, others affect the office, and some results affect the manager. Individual results from appreciation are: confidence, happiness, self-pride, increased productivity and reassurance. Office results from appreciation are: higher morale and increased productivity. These results trickle down and affect patients. Manager results from appreciation are a bond of trust between you and your employees, and trust between staff. Beware of the busy trap. Failures will happen. Managers get busy and forget to tell their employees they appreciate them. Employees will disappoint you, but all of these are fixable. Stop and remember the employee who is appreciated will always do more than expected. There are bright spots even in failure, lessons to be learned and lessons to be taught.

Resources

1. English Oxford Dictionary website.
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2. <https://workmatters.com/employee-appreciation-statistics-leaders-should-know/>. Accessed February 25, 2019
3. <https://www.business2community.com/human-resources/10-employee-recognition-stats-cant-ignore-01878458>. Accessed February 26, 2019