

TIP #45 – OCTOBER 2010
THE AFFIRMATION MATRIX
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Objective:

- Help leaders explore the variety of ways their constituents receive praise best
- Explore the variety of ways a leader can deliver praise most effectively

Audience: Leaders and managers, one-on-one or in a group setting

Time required: 15 - 30 minutes

Materials needed:

- One 8 1/2 x 11” blank piece of paper
- A pen or pencil

Explanation: In giving praise and affirmation to others, I have noticed that some people read everything you give them while others ignore written communication entirely, preferring to be spoken to instead. Some people swell with pride at being recognized in public and for others--and for other cultures as well--public praise is embarrassing and humiliating.

I have also noticed that there are times in the course of business life where praise is expected—like at the end of a challenging project or when a constituent has achieved a major milestone. You don't want to let those times go unnoticed. But praise is also needed--and makes a significant impact--at totally unexpected occasions.

Finally, there are those whose cubicles are lined with pictures of their family, their friends, their dogs, their friends' dogs, and so on. And there are others with virtually no pictures at all in their work space. In other words, there are those where work is work and life is life and the two don't mix, and others where everything blurs together. Leaders must be attentive to all of these variables.

I refer to these variables as currency. If you were in Europe you would use the euro, while in Japan the yen, and in Mexico the peso. This exercise helps leaders make deposits into the accounts of their constituents with the currency that works best for the recipient.

Process:

1. Have each participant take an 8 1/2 x 11” piece of paper and hold it up in portrait orientation (8 1/2” side up). Fold it in half from top to bottom once, and fold it in half from top to bottom again. Then fold the paper in half, this time from side to side. Now open the piece of paper.

This is what you should have:

2. Now have each participant write in the center of the upper left-hand box the word **SPOKEN** and in the center of the upper right-hand box write the word **WRITTEN**.
3. In the box immediately below the upper left hand box (two from the top) have each participant write the word **PUBLIC** in the center and in the center of the box to the right, write the word **PRIVATE**.
4. In the box that is three boxes from the top (two from the bottom), have each participant write the word **EXPECTED** in the center and in the center of the box to the right, write the word **UNEXPECTED**.
5. Finally have each participant write in the center of the bottom left-hand box the word **PROFESSIONAL** and in the center of the bottom right-hand box write the word **PERSONAL**.

This is what you should have:

SPOKEN	WRITTEN
PUBLIC	PRIVATE
EXPECTED	UNEXPECTED
PROFESSIONAL	PERSONAL

Now it is time to use this matrix, combining elements from the rows and columns.

6. Imagine you are a sales manager with a member of your sales team who achieved the highest sales in your region for the last quarter. How would you praise this person for their achievement in a way that was:

SPOKEN, PUBLIC, EXPECTED, PROFESSIONAL

7. Imagine that this sales person was more quiet and shy. (Yes, we are using our imagination, but such sales people do exist.) How would you praise this person for their achievement in a way that was:

SPOKEN, PRIVATE, EXPECTED, PROFESSIONAL

Notice how when you change just one of the elements, you get a very different way to offer praise?

8. Now imagine that you manage this person virtually and there are no team meetings or face-to-face encounters. How would you praise this person for that achievement in a way that was:

WRITTEN, PRIVATE, EXPECTED, PROFESSIONAL

9. How would you do it in a way that was:

WRITTEN, PUBLIC, EXPECTED, PROFESSIONAL

Again, notice how when you change the elements, you get a very different way to offer praise.

10. What would praise look like if it were

SPOKEN, PRIVATE, UNEXPECTED, PROFESSIONAL

or

SPOKEN, PRIVATE, UNEXPECTED, PERSONAL

11. Work through all the “praise possibilities” in the actual situations with the actual people your leaders encounter.
12. Have your leaders make a list of each of their direct reports and determine a specific way they will praise each of them in the next week. Have your leaders write these down and share them with one other person as a point of accountability. Additionally, consider adding supervisors, co-workers, and family members to this list.

Facilitator tips: I have used this exercise in one-on-one coaching sessions and in group training events where it never fails to turn on the light bulbs. One executive actually taped his completed paper exercise to his computer monitor to keep it at the top of his mind.

One question I am asked almost every time I present this exercise is, “Is there some way we can know a person’s preferred way to receive praise?” My answer is two-fold: 1) pay attention to your people—the items on The Affirmation Matrix are pretty easy to figure out; and 2) ask them.

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