

the power of **upward** praise

by tim browne



“ *If as managers we wish to be effective, we must learn how to lead the people we report to, as well as the employees we oversee.* ”

Suck up, brown-nose, teacher's pet; all these are names we risk being called should we choose to give the boss a compliment or even say thank you to them for doing a good job. Yet the risk is one that is worth taking, especially when we follow a couple of golden rules.

Managers at all levels tend to agree that giving our staff praise and recognition is a crucial strategy in creating a positive workplace culture and in boosting staff morale and productivity. The link between regular praise and the following benefits is widely accepted as gospel:

Benefits of Giving Praise & Recognition

- ✓ Raises staff morale and self esteem
- ✓ Reinforces desired behaviors and attitudes
- ✓ Increases productivity
- ✓ Clarifies expectations
- ✓ Calcifies team engagement and commitment
- ✓ Creates an environment where honest feedback (both positive and negative) is aired in a professional and open manner

Managers use praise and recognition strategies well with their staff and although some workplaces could do with a little more positive reinforcement – managers understand that praising staff is worth the effort. What is also pleasing is that most managers ensure that when they give praise – they give it with G.S.T.

That is; praise must always be;

Genuine – only give praise where praise is due.

Specific – focus on an particular aspect of the performance or the job done rather than a generalised sweeping comment about the person.

Timely – the annual performance review is not the time to say “well done!” when a staff member performs well – tell them as soon as possible.

Successful managers also understand they need to develop positive relationships with everyone they depend on – including the boss. A compatible relationship with our superior is essential to being effective in our jobs.

If as managers we wish to be effective, we must learn how to lead the people we report to, as well as the employees we oversee. This process is called leading up. Leading or managing up is not about political manoeuvring. Rather it is about the process of consciously working with our superior to obtain the best possible result for ourselves, our boss and the organisation.

A key strategy in learning to lead up effectively is to know why, when and how to give praise and recognition upwards.

The great thing about giving the boss praise, is that aside from the social stigma of being seen as a suck up – the process is simple and the reasons to do so are compelling.

After seeing my own boss speak at a recent conference I had organised I remarked to a colleague that I thought he had done a great job. My colleague agreed and asked me why I didn't say so to the boss? So, I took his advice and decided to write a thank you email to my manager. As I booted up my laptop and opened a blank email, my hands started to sweat, my heart began to thump and my mind went blank. I had no idea what to write and how to express a simple thank you to the boss. A task I easily and regularly do with my own staff. This, of course, was due to my fear of being labeled a 'suck up' and I realised just how conditioned we are not to give praise upwards.

Yet if we adhere to the G.S.T. principle of giving praise and recognition we are, in fact, in no danger of actually being a suck up or brown nose. If our praise is genuine, timely and specific there should be no reason, apart from our own fear, of communicating this to the boss.

I am sure I don't need to convince

anyone that the same benefits of giving praise and recognition to staff also apply if we are to use the tool upwards. Upon receiving a small piece of praise, managers are likely to feel better about themselves, repeat the same behaviour, raise the level of their performance, give more to the team and, most importantly, are likely to better receive any negative feedback that you need to give them in the future. If all they hear from you is bad news – then often your message will fall on deaf or tired ears. A blend of honest, positive and negative feedback will always improve a working relationship between a boss and employee.

My final argument for the need to consciously give more praise and recognition upwards is to appeal to your own experiences as a manager. Have you ever received a thank you or a compliment from a staff member? How did it feel? What did it do for you, for your relationship and for your opinion of the staff member that had the guts to buck their conditioned fear of being seen as brown-nose and say thank you?

It is so sad that the usual theme of communication with our managers revolves around things that have gone wrong, issues that need resolving or negative feedback about a situation or person. Think about your conversations with your own boss. Perhaps you can try to catch them doing the right thing and see what happens to them, your relationship and the culture of your team.



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Tim will be presenting his workshop – The Art of Leading and Managing Up across Australia in 2012. Visit the Proteus website for details.