

# MATTMCWILLIAMS

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

## How to Get Others to Perform at Their Highest Level

*You Can Increase Productivity by 31% with Recognition and Praise*

Leaders who are positive and encouraging have more productive teams. That is a fact. "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar." Maybe your mom said that too. I never really believed it until I became a leader, beginning with my first team at work more than ten years ago and continuing with my family today.

When I first became a leader in 2002, I was (trust me, this isn't an exaggeration) ruthless, negative, and discouraging. I caught every mistake, pointed them out to team members in front of others, fired people on the spot, and rarely, if ever, encouraged my team members. In other words, I sucked as a leader.

And yet we got by, which was usually enough for me to keep my job. Hard work and long hours from me did, in fact, make up for my failings. But it was always a struggle.

### **What changed me?**

My journey has been a long one. I learned that the best way to increase productivity is to focus on the positives, not the negatives. I learned that my team, like everyone else, needed ongoing encouragement and recognition.

I learned that being positive and encouraging could lead to a 31% increase in my team's performance, according to a study done at the University of Pennsylvania by Margaret Greenberg and Dana Arakawa.

### **31%!**

31% more productivity meant...well, about 100% more income for me. So, selfishly, I began to be more positive and encouraging. No, I didn't put on a big, fake smile and walk around slapping all the guys on the butt and giving everyone the "wink and the gun." (Not sure what the "wink and the gun" is? Check out this classic clip from Fresh Prince of Bel-Air)

There were no grand speeches or big announcements. At first, it was very subtle, lest my team think my body had been overtaken by kinder, gentler aliens.

I simply started holding my tongue when it wanted to lash out at someone in public. I made sure to encourage one or two people publicly each day. And wrote at least one thank you note each week. That was it to start.

## **More motivating than money**

I also learned during this time that my praise and recognition is more motivating than money. More motivating than money?

Wasn't everyone else driven by a financial scorecard like me?

Apparently not. According to the book *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation* by Edward Deci. He points out that when the leader is specific with his praise (i.e. he points out a specific customer call or compliments him on a particular project), the emotional lift is almost as high as getting a large bonus. And when that specificity is paired with a deliberate delivery (a presentation or announcement or even a card), it becomes *more* motivating than money.

When done consistently, it creates an unbeatable sense of loyalty and drives teams to unimaginable levels of performance.

## **Creative recognition works best - Why awards transform cultures**

A private thank you email or card is great.

Praising someone in front of others is even better.

But do you know what transforms a culture?

Creative recognition, particularly huge, gaudy awards and trophies.

Take, for instance, the Danish auto parts company Kjaer Group. They modeled their award after the highest order in Denmark, the Order of the Elephant.

Theirs, however, is not a fancy crest given by the queen. It's a giant stuffed animal. And any team member can give it to another team member for doing something extraordinary.

What happens when someone is awarded the elephant?

The same three things that happen when any award is given like this:

### **1. The recipient is elated.**

This is obvious. The recipient is rewarded and is more motivated.

### **2. The behavior is reinforced in the recipient.**

Naturally, being rewarded for something reinforces that behavior. The sight and remembrance of the elephant will drive the recipient to continue that behavior and seek out new ways to excel in the future.

### **3. It creates stories and best practices.**

Alexander Kjerulf writes about the elephant in his book *Happy Hour is 9 to 5*. In it, he writes that when other team members notice the elephant on someone's desk, they immediately say "Hey, you got the elephant. What did you do?"

That triggers a story, which is essentially a sharing of best practices. These stories build up over time. They spread and are retold for years and years. Recipients become legends and the culture changes for the better.

Who knew a simple stuffed toy could do such a powerful thing?

That is the power of creative recognition.

And, in case you didn't know, all of this applies to your family as well.

***How can you motivate someone today with recognition and praise, at home or at work?***