

THANK YOU!



Active Appreciation is a powerful tool that, when authentically deployed by leaders, will increase engagement, motivate change and improve morale. So why don't leaders use it more often? What they typically tell me is, "I thought about it but I didn't have the time," and "I thought about it, but before I could tell the person I got caught up in something else and forgot." I've also heard, "I'm not here to make people feel good; they should appreciate they have job." And, "I have a business to run; if people need hugs, their working for the wrong company." Although I can understand the excuses of not enough time and forgetting, and studies strongly suggest that the latter attitudes stifle, if not kill, high level engagement and performance, both present lost opportunities to achieve what they want – a motivated, engaged and committed workforce. And in today's recessionary and turbulent business climate when more is being taken away, *Active Appreciation* is a gift that has minimum cost, yet is highly valued by employees and has a high ROI.

Recently I asked for a show of hands from a group of 50 employees to the following question. What would you value more from your employer, a holiday party or frequent words of appreciation? Words of appreciation were the decisive winner. Leaders underestimate how important they are to the people who choose to work for them and how powerful their words of appreciation can be in building and strengthening relationships and performance. Being recognized and appreciated, particularly by someone who has the status of a leader, teacher or parent, is a basic human desire. Unmet, it can strain relationships - leaving people feeling unwanted and unappreciated.

In a survey of more than 15 million employees, the Gallup Organization found that engagement and performance are created, strengthened and sustained when leaders encourage employee development, demonstrate their caring and give employees recognition every 7 days. *Active Appreciation* encompasses each of these factors.

It's also interesting to note that when I ask leaders to reflect on someone in their life who had or has a positive impact on their career and life, and what did these individuals do to achieve this status in their life, they invariably identify relational and emotional factors such as: He respected my opinion, he cared about me, she gave me honest feedback, she encouraged me. These personal reflections support

what many studies have identified: the power of recognition and appreciation is a powerful tool in building and strengthening relationships, engagement and performance.

VIP Reflection

Reflect for a moment on someone who has had a positive impact on your life and career. What is it that you remember and appreciate about this person? What did they do and how did they do it?

There tends to be a gap in perception between leaders and employees regarding appreciation and recognition. Leaders tend to respond with a resounding yes when asked the question, “Do you appreciate the people who work for you?” When I talk with employees and ask them, “Do you

feel appreciated?”, the responses are mixed at best. This gap is what I call the “appreciation gap”. It doesn’t matter, as leader, if you think you appreciate your employees – what matters is if your employees feel appreciated. Closing this gap can make an enormous difference in the level of engagement and performance of your employees.

Active Appreciation is an essential leadership tool and when used authentically it can strengthen the bond between leaders and employees, parents and children and between spouses. Active Appreciation isn’t just words shared or written; the science of how our brains works, neuro-science, shows how the feeling of appreciation affects our bodies and behavior of both receiver as well as the giver.

Why Active Appreciation instead of just Appreciation? Although just thinking and feeling a sense of appreciation can be beneficial, its real power is in the process of giving it.

Active behavior is marked by or involving direct participation. It is openly acknowledging or expressing, producing an intended action or effect: *active ingredients*. For our discussion the active ingredient is Appreciation.

Appreciation is an expression of gratitude. **Active Appreciation** is a verb. It means that leaders personally give their appreciation by expressing and acknowledging their gratitude for behavior that supports the organization's values, mission and business objectives.

Reflect for a moment and recall a time at work when you felt unappreciated. How did it feel and what did it do to your motivation, engagement and commitment to your performance, your boss and the company? If your experience is similar to mine, all of those factors decreased and included bouts of

self-pity – all of which were non-productive for the company and for me.

Leaders spend a great deal of time noticing what they don't want and usually let employees know when they've missed the mark. What if they spent as much time noticing behavior that supports what they want, and actively showed their appreciation for that behavior? Gallup and other studies indicate that we get more of what we focus on. This is the power of Active Appreciation; the more you focus on actively appreciating behaviors you want, the more your employees will behave accordingly.

Seeing Red Cars

Is an excellent short film that depicts how focusing on What You Want can make a significant difference in performance

Let's assume that your company values teamwork. And let's assume that a machine needs a maintenance function and that one person can do it, but if another person assists, it makes the job easier, faster and increases the level of safety. One of your employees agrees to perform the maintenance; another operator speaks up and says "I've got an extra minute, let me help you with it." The second operator, by offering to assist, is demonstrating the spirit of teamwork. When you actively

indicate your appreciation of the employee's willingness to assist his teammate you are sending a message that you value teamwork, as well as individual performance. By recognizing and actively appreciating behaviors that support and demonstrate the values you want, you will get more of it - in this case, more teamwork, safety and caring for each other.

[WW](#)

Stress, Neuro-Science and Active Appreciation

I've heard leaders refer to employee engagement and morale and the skills that can build and strengthen these factors as the "soft stuff". And in fiscally lean and stressful times the "soft stuff" is typically the first thing that gets cut out. Not only is this thinking misguided and unfortunate, the facts don't support it. In fact, the "soft stuff" and why it works is based in "hard" science.

I think we can agree that this turbulent environment is causing an increase in stress in almost every aspect of work and family life today. We know from studying people that stress creates changes in the biochemistry of our bodies and in our behavior. In fact, 65% to as high as 85% of the reasons people visit their primary care physician is for stress related problems. Stress narrows our perception, reduces logical and creative thinking and it is associated with numerous physical and emotional issues. When an individual feels stressed, the brain goes on alert status – ready to detect any perceived risk of danger.

It mobilizes our body to respond to any perceived danger by releasing a cascade of hormones, one of which is called cortisol into our bloodstream. Cortisol is intended to keep the alert switch on, even if the perceived threat has passed. Being constantly on alert makes us edgy and distracted from the work we are supposed to be focused on. If you were stranded in a jungle, your survival would depend on our being hyper-aware of all the dangers lurking, and cortisol would be helpful. However in a “normal” world it works against our ability to efficiently and effectively perform. We know that in today’s stressful work environment that our work is not normal. It is filled with possible risks and threats, which are heightened in this recessionary climate. I’ve had high performing leaders tell me that they have become unsettled and stressed just hearing about lay-offs even when they’ve been told that they don’t have to worry. The amount of cortisol flowing in the aggregate bloodstream of today’s workforce is running way above normal! This is not healthy for the individual or the organization, which is relying on the performance of a few to keep it competitive and productive.

Neuro-scientists discovered another hormone, which has a calming effect and decreases the hormones associated with stress, particularly cortisol. They discovered that feelings of appreciation and gratitude stimulate the production of a hormone called oxytocin. The feeling of being appreciated produces oxytocin, which neutralizes and decreases the production of cortisol, thereby reducing our unproductive hyper-vigilance. In addition, there is a link between oxytocin and the emotion of trust. Trust is an essential factor in employee commitment, loyalty and performance. When leaders focus on and deploy appreciation, they are like a doctor giving medication to reduce stress and build trust, helping employees restore and build their level of performance.

Studies have shown that it takes a minimum of 3 positive thoughts and or feelings to offset one negative thought or feeling. Studies also show that people perform better in an environment that is more positive than negative. As mentioned, the turbulent stressful environment that we are experiencing creates an ample supply of negative thoughts and feelings. As a leader you can help reduce stress and create a work climate that is more productive by using *Active Appreciation* to offset the effects of stress and the negative thoughts and feelings that affect people every day.

What’s the ROI for ME

Active Appreciation is a powerful tool for creating the behavior you want and influencing people to change. It is a skill of high performing leaders and companies. And there is one more important fact.

Not only does *Active Appreciation* make the other person less stressed and more open to change; you also benefit from the same effects and outcomes. The more you use *Active Appreciation*, the more you will notice a shift within yourself toward a more optimistic and positive outlook and feeling less stressed. These effects and benefits showed up in a recent *Beyond Stress Management ... Strengthening Your Resiliency* program.

We had just finished discussing the power of appreciation and gratitude in recharging our resiliency batteries and I invited the participants to write a note of appreciation to someone in their life for whom they felt a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude. I passed out note cards and envelopes and everyone began writing.

Earlier in the workshop I had passed out Biodots, little dots that measure stress, which are placed on your hand. The dots react to the temperature of your blood by changing colors. When stressed, blood is routed to areas and parts of our body that are vital for survival, therefore, blood supply to our extremities are decreased. When we feel less stress the flow of blood is more even throughout our entire body and it will change the color of the dot to yellow, green and blues depending on how relaxed we feel. One of the participants noticed that throughout the day her dot stayed black. We talked about it at a break and she indicated that her intense style and approach to work made it hard for her to de-stress.



body that are vital for survival, therefore, are decreased. When we feel less stress the throughout our entire body and it will change green and blues depending on how relaxed noticed that throughout the day her dot

After everyone finished their appreciation notes we took a short break. On the break this participant came up and showed me her Biodot. It had turned green. As she was writing her note she completely focused her attention on her feelings of appreciation. And as she was writing, she noticed that her Biodot began to change from black to yellow and then to green. For her and me, this was a moment that vividly showed the power that Active Appreciation has on our sense of well-being. And I am sure that when she gave her note of appreciation to the person she was thinking about, they also experienced an increased sense of well-being

In 2004 Forbes magazine selected the 109-year-old company, J.M. Smucker as the best company to work for. When co-CEOs Tim and Richard were asked what they attributed their success to and why over 2,930 employees were so dedicated to the company they responded that for 107 years they have lived by one code:

- Listen with your full attention
- Look for the good in others
- Have a sense of humor and
- Say Thank You for a job well done

I can't find a better way to summarize this article than to recommend J. M. Smucker's code as a way to experience more appreciation and gratitude in your work and life. In a time that is turbulent and stressful you can make a difference, you can change how you and your employees feel and perform, and it only costs a few moments of your time. The effort will reap enormous rewards and benefits personally and professionally.

Resources:

- Biodots: www.stresstop.com
- Films: www.seeingredcars.com
- Article: *Oxytocin is Associated with Human Trustworthiness*, Zak, Kurzban and Matzner