

This week I am writing about Praise and how powerful it is. If you have any praise stories let me know and I will pass them on.

Have a great week.

Paul

Creativity, Confidence and Praise

"Creativity is so delicate a flower that praise tends to make it bloom, while discouragement often nips it in the bud". Alex Osborn

Did you ever see a child begin to walk? They get up and fall down, everyone around instinctively praises the child for their efforts. The child gets up again and again to the praise. No one suggests that the child do this or that, or gives "constructive criticism" to improve the child's walking skills. They just let the child falter and praise her or him. I believe because of the praise, the child continues to challenge him or herself.

We all need praise once in a while to keep us moving. However something happens to us after some traditional schooling, we think that by pointing out flaws, in the name of "constructive criticism", is the way to making people better. As a teacher I did that, students would hand in their term paper, and I would go to work finding all of the mistakes they had made and underline them in red, to accentuate their need for more work. In class I would have students go to the board and write their sentences and then I would point out the flaws along with the class's help. In retrospect I am not sure that worked as well as finding what was right with their sentences. I have a class that I train for teachers, teachers are assigned a term-paper to read and highlight in green all of the things that are right with it. Many have shared with me the frustration of pointing out what went right instead of what is wrong. I am not suggesting that we never point out what is wrong but rather change the focus.

When I taught job seekers, I used similar techniques, except I would tell them what they did well and then hit them with "constructive criticism". I began to realize that the clients needed confidence and found a better way of doing it. I began only pointing out what they did right. The more I pointed out their successes and ignored their flaws the more they became confident and the flaws slowly started taking care of themselves.

This week I am going to look for positive things that my students do and genuinely praise their successes. Maybe we could apply this to our co-workers and customers, our employees and our supervisors they need praise too. Let's waive the "constructive criticism" for just this week and see what happens. If you have any praise stories let me know and I will pass them on.

RESPONCES

I've got a praise story for you. Before working at the Marin County One-Stop, I worked at a small college. As a side project, I was working on an article (based on my college thesis) that I wanted to get published. I asked two professors at the college to look it over and give me feedback. The first professor, "John," got back to me pretty quickly and had very constructive comments. He said it was almost ready to be published and gave a few suggestions for things to improve. I incorporated John's comments into my paper, and since several months had passed, I sent it in to a publisher without hearing back from the second professor, "Edith. Edith finally got back to me with her comments. She said, "This is good for where you were at that point in your life, but it'll never be published." No advice on how to improve it, either. I was really disheartened and figured I would be getting a rejection letter from the publisher. Imagine my surprise when the publisher accepted it, and without requesting major revisions! If I had gotten the comments from Edith first, I would never even have sent my article in to the publisher. This experience really illustrated for me how people, particularly those in power like teachers, can really impact others. Racy

Thank you so much. I really do believe that things take a turn for the best when we look at people's accomplishments no matter how small, and give praise. It feels good and makes people feel good as well. Galya

I really liked those passages on praise and I did pass them on here to various counselors also. I have given a sort of praise that I did find worked a few times and that was praising someone on how nice they looked today or that I really liked their hair today, etc. This went for both men and women. Other than that, I have not tried much more than that and so I will try to remember to do that. June NY

We just had a great story from hear, one our participants, somewhat low functioning, was just offered a job at the Salvation Army Thrift Store. She initially was assigned as a Work Experience. She was not attending, was not dressed appropriately and overall had a very poor attitude. The supervisor at Salvation Army and I met with this person to discuss these issues, we did address them, but we also addressed her positive qualities, great smile, how she watches out for people who may be stealing, etc. In the last month her job performance improved so much, the supervisor indicated she wanted to hire this person 20 hours per week. So it just goes to show ya a little praise can go a long way! Rhonda IA

I really believe in the power of praise. When I worked in the Welfare to Work Program I constantly dealt with the clients on a "strength" based concept. We would assess their skills and dreams and work from there. If someone said they had always wanted to work in the human services field I would respond - I can see you have a really compassionate heart and you would be great at that. Now lets discuss the pathways and barriers to reaching this goal. People could easily find multiple reasons why they couldn't reach the goal, but could often not think of the positive things they brought toward reaching the goal. It was refocusing their cognitive thought process from negativity to positive affirmations that was the key.

I believe we are all made in the image of God, and have entered the world with everything we need to fulfill our special purpose on earth. Over the years we are programmed to believe what we brought into this world is not enough. This leads to the negative feelings of shame that keep us bound from reaching our true potential. We are taught early in life to conform to what others think is right. People can usually identify all their faults, but their potential is harder to tap in to. We have been told we are not good enough by schools, religion, sports, parents, the media and each other.

There have been numerous studies that indicate people reach and exceed their potential when given consistent positive reinforcement, yet we still treat clients as defective people, we have to "fix". I gave up the idea about saving others long ago, that's God's job. My only commission is to see the positive in others and encourage them to love themselves. Jesus said, "Love others as you would love yourself." Why has our society failed so miserably at teaching people to love themselves?

I am currently working on a book, "Just a Little Dinghy in the Sea of Life (confessions of a dysfunctional housewife)". I hope it will help take the pressure off women to be "perfect". If you want to see a "perfect" human go look in the mirror. I guess my praise technique has been successful as many of my ex-welfare-to-work clients are still self-sufficient and many still keep in touch, even though I now work for DVR. In fact, I ran into one this weekend. She was a native client, with a long past of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. All I did for her was help her believe how valuable she was, despite what she had heard and experienced in the past. And that she was perfectly capable of leading a successful life. Through supportive services we purchased a set of dentures (her teeth had been lost through poor nutrition and abuse). With her new smile her confidence soared. When I saw her in a local clothing store, she rushed to me and excitedly said she had worked there almost 2 years and is completely off public assistance. She thanked me for the positive case management and all I did to "help" her. I told her she had everything she needed all along she just needed someone to remind her. Seneca wrote: "Wherever there is a human being there is an opportunity for kindness" and I would add "and praise". It is not so difficult to be different from the rest of the world, just be positive! We can make changes, one praise, one person at a time! Loretta AK

look forward to your weekly e-mails. In particular this week's communication on praise is especially compelling. I was determined years ago to go into the field of Career Development rather than Social Work for the very reason that something told me that motivation has to do with illuminating what's 'right.' Today I understand the field is called positive psychology. Therapists call it Cognitive Therapy. My work with strengths (master strength/manage weakness) has proven that when I feel confident/hopeful that I garner the resources to move through the pain of my weaknesses or they just become irrelevant. I will go after my MSW this year (my MA is a special major in career dev.) from the perspective of asset building in the self and community. Hooray for our times. Fran CA

I think that as work loads increase and funding decreases this needs to be a priority to most of us. We ask more and more of our people and need to make sure they feel we

appreciate what they do and who they are. If we are not getting it from management, we need to give it to our co-workers and ourselves. I like to give pats on the back and small pieces of recognition on a regular basis. I give small notes, awards, stars, treats, small gifts, and verbal praise, but don't feel I do it enough. We need to make sure we are never too busy to say "job well done", "I appreciate your work", "I'm glad you are a part of my team" often and in different sincere ways. We all have special gifts we are blessed with and we need to utilize and appreciate those gifts in people.

If we are working with participants, that is even more important. We may be the only positive force in their life. We know how important it is to us. It would be even more so in a participant's life. I like to send cards with confetti in them when ever they do something special and verbal praise about how proud I am of them when ever they take a small step. It doesn't take much time to say "I'm proud of you". I've had participants cry when I've told them that. They have never had anyone tell them that. We don't realize how we can impact their lives. Elaine IA

This is such an important subject everywhere, and anywhere in the world. It doesn't matter if you are a baby learning to crawl, or an adult wanting to survive. I am a strong believer in praising. I grew up in an environment, without my mother, where all I ever heard from several relatives was what messy kids we were. All the negatives were there, including that we would never amount to anything in this world as we didn't have our mother, that we would have children from Tom, Dick and Harry.....blah, blah, blaaahhhh :) I had to believe in myself, and praise myself for what I did. I NEVER forget the one relative that always praised us even if it was for just surviving. He never said a negative thing about us, and always told us that we would do well so as long as we wanted to. He has been very dear to me all my life. He is an uncle on my father's side. He is the one person that I have always remembered, and have always had kind words, hugs, etc for him. I also had a teacher that praised me, and he is also very much in my thoughts as someone that had faith in me. I have always been a person to praise people, especially children. I have relatives that talk silly things about their husbands in front of the children, I ask them not to do that when talking to me, the children will understand what they are saying. I prefer to praise people instead of putting them down. I have always told my children that anything is possible, so as long as they really want it. I have a son that is a performer, artist, and believes in himself that he will make it to Hollywood. :) I encourage him; I attend all his performances I possibly can. And he has had the opportunity to do a lot of traveling, meeting great people from Hollywood, and other places, people I have never even imagine ever meeting. More power to praising Lydia CA