

Praise should come more often than Santa

by Michael_Kinsman

Many years ago, I looked up from my desk to see Santa coming.

I knew it was Santa by the red suit and hat and long white beard. Only when he got closer, I realized that this Santa also happened to be my company's chief executive.

"Merry Christmas," he bellowed, dropping off 3-inch candy canes on the desks of workers whose names he did not know.

I remember going home that night, depressed that I somehow was supposed to feel better about having a job because somebody who didn't know my name had just offered me a piece of candy.

And, I imagine there will be others who feel the same way this holiday when companies strain to make their employees feel warm and fuzzy about working for their companies.

I can already see the e-mails coming in: "Dear Michael: We at XYZ Corp. appreciate the hard work you do to make our company a success. Sincerely, Mr. Clueless."

There is a way to make employees feel good about themselves and a way to just make them feel insignificant.

This holiday season, employers who want to make a good impression on the people who work for them are going to have to work at it.

Bob Nelson, perhaps America's foremost expert in employee rewards, pushes a simple but effective message to corporate chieftains throughout the country: Timely, sincere and personal praise can be a powerful tool.

Nelson, whose 1994 book "1001 Ways to Reward Employees" has sold 1.5 million copies, says most managers aren't effective at communicating praise to their employees because they are not trained to do so.

Meanwhile, surveys show that most workers don't feel they receive enough praise from their bosses.

"How can that happen?" Nelson asks. "It may seem like common sense, but it is not common practice."

He suggests that employers not wait for the holidays to show workers they appreciate them. He encourages managers to look for reasons to thank their employees for their work, doing it face to face or with a well-written note that is sincere and delivered shortly after the worker's feat.

It takes a different mindset for managers. This is not a task to be crossed off a to-do list. This is a basic requirement of everyday management and it never goes away.

You might be surprised by the impact it can have on individuals.

Buried in my desk drawer, I have a handwritten note that a long-ago editor wrote me, praising me for my work. I kept the note because I respected that editor deeply and was honored that he recognized what I thought was important.

I don't work for the editor anymore, but I keep the note around and every so often I come across it and read it and feel really good about my work. And, I can assure you I'd much rather work for him again than I would Santa.

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