



Respect - just a little bit

By M.J. Clark, M.A., APR

I recently worked with a team of employees who said they did not feel respected in the workplace. They worked in a very demanding situation where they often had tight deadlines and worked long hours. They all seemed to love the company but felt their immediate supervisors talked down to them and kept them in the dark. They were motivated to help the company, but not the individuals for whom they worked necessarily.

This reminded me of a job I held for only three months right after graduating from college. I loved the company, but struggled to understand my supervisor. I was full of excitement over my first real job, and couldn't wait to contribute to the department. But when I would present an idea to my supervisor, he would tell me it probably wouldn't work, but it would be okay if I wanted to try it anyway. It was very tough to even muster the courage to try it, when faced with such pessimism from someone with more experience than me.

My boss never encouraged me, never told me I was doing anything well. I waited for a word, any word, to tell me I was on the right track and in the right field. I felt like I was swimming upstream, and I found getting out of bed in the morning more of a struggle as time wore on.

When I quit my job, I did it with mixed feelings. I wanted so much for it to work out because I really believed in the company but, emotionally, I was not strong enough to stay. I will never forget the conversation I had a few days later with a colleague of my supervisor. She told me my supervisor was completely distraught that I was leaving. She said he told her I was bright and enthusiastic and added so much to the department that he wasn't sure what he would do now that I was leaving. I couldn't believe my ears! If he had only said those things in that three-month period, I never would have left. Because of the way he treated me, I would have guessed he thought just the opposite of me.

So many people fear authentic communication with those they supervise. They don't realize that a few words of encouragement or praise could mean a big difference in how loyal and enthusiastic an employee can be. Even honest criticism, if delivered gently, can motivate employees to strive to do their best.

I have never forgotten the lesson I learned from that experience. Now, when I think something such as, "Wow! That person really put forth effort to ensure that my experience was a good one," I actually say those words to the person. When you verbally appreciate someone, you show them respect. People who feel respected will do all they can for you. Making demands on employees, and treating them as lesser than you, has just the opposite effect.

I challenge you, this week, to attempt to compliment an employee twice for every criticism you deliver. If you change your own behavior, theirs is sure to follow.