

How To Offer Individual Praise Without Undermining Team Efforts

By Carole Nicolaidis

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A lot of discussions lately are centered around teamwork and leadership. This is especially an issue after all the leadership scandals that have been brought to light in corporate America this past year. Due to major layoffs, and the loss of exceptional brainpower, there is a huge need for leaders who possess both a heart and a sound knowledge base at the same time. The quest is on! Leadership books outsold all books this summer giving us great insight into the challenges of companies around the world.

So where do you start when creating a great leader? Everybody seems to start with teamwork. Teamwork will lead to excellence, which will eventually translate into better company results. But common approaches to teamwork are lacking. It's time for a little innovation! Let's focus on an approach that happens to shock a few people. An approach that is quite different than what management gurus have been preaching for the past 15 years.

If we want people to be good at what they do, love their work, and be proud that they belong to something bigger than themselves, we need to change our traditional management thinking. We, as leaders, need to remind ourselves that people are people and individualism is by no means dead. People still crave individual praise.

I admit as a leader you are walking a fine line between honoring individualism and cultivating teamwork, yet the bottom line is that it can be done. In fact, it **MUST** be done if you want to recharge your employee's creative batteries. People's morale, faith and most importantly loyalty are so low these days. As a leader, you need to use a variety of motivational, and inspirational tactics if you want them to feel self-confident. Without this, you can be sure that they will not leverage all their potential.

Contrary to some beliefs, individual attention will by no means jeopardize your work in building an effective team. Think of it as an opportunity to embrace and inspire individualism without sacrificing the collective effort. Every one of your people is good at something. Find that "something" and allow them to shine through it.

How do you walk that fine line between teamwork and individual praise? Here are a few ideas that you can implement immediately.

§ Acknowledge that everyone has an ego. People need praise. This is a proven fact. But how do you “stroke” someone’s ego without destroying your team? Offer individual praise based on each employee’s contribution to the team. As you speak casually with your team members, look for opportunities to offer accolades. An example would be, “Ellen, you amaze me! Your organizational skills are simply excellent. I don’t know where our team would be without your contributions.” Another way would be to publicly acknowledge each team member in meetings. When the team reaches a goal, praise the team as a whole first then offer a brief statement of how each person’s individual contributions played a vital role in the team’s success. In this way, you can boost an individual’s ego without diminishing the team effort.

§ Acknowledge the “personalization” of work. No doubt you’ve heard the saying, “Don’t take it personally. It’s just business.” The truth is that many people do take business personally. Managers and employees alike are often offended when their department faces budget cuts, or when their projects are tabled. However, for all the negative connotations of “taking it personally,” it really can be beneficial. Encourage your people to take ownership of their work. And praise them for doing so. This is a form of showing commitment to the team and the organization as a whole. It is also an outlet for you to offer individual praise that will benefit both the employee and the team.

§ People understand things differently. How often have you overheard (or be party to) a disagreement that ended with the statement “Oh! I’m sorry. I didn’t understand what you were saying”? Not everyone understands things the same way. When only team praise is offered, many employees will misconstrue your actions. Many will think they hold no personal value to you or to the business. The result? Hurt feelings come into play, and a lack of morale and productivity seep in. By adding a good dose of individual praise to your management mix, you can ensure that each person understands their individual value, and their value to the team.

§ People communicate differently. While some of your people will draw personal satisfaction from receiving team acknowledgement, others will feel undervalued. The reason? People communicate, and receive communication, differently. This fact is the primary reason for offering both individual and team praise. Through group and individual communication, all your employees can receive the encouragement they need to move forward and achieve new levels of productivity and team unity.

Does this approach sound time consuming? It really isn’t. In fact, you will most likely eliminate hours of unnecessary work in addressing negative performances and low performance levels. A quick comment, a short email, or a three sentence handwritten note all work equally well.

People need individual attention. By creating an environment where each person can thrive, and by offering assignments that allow them to gain individual and group praise, you foster a team culture where you and your employees benefit.

Carole is President and Executive Coach of Progressive Leadership, offering executive coaching, organizational development consulting and leadership development training. Improve your business relationships, communication, team performance and bottom line starting now. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & subscriptions to Carole’s FREE Ezine.

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