4 Ways to Improve Your Workplace with Authentic Gratitude

Improving workplace culture with authentic gratitude is sometimes an overlooked aspect of many successful organizations. A simple "thank you" can go a long way.

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Thank you. Two little words that make a world of difference. We're taught from a very young age the importance of saying "please" and "thank you," and, for most of us, that has stuck with us through adulthood. So why don't we always say it at work? Thanksgiving is this week, which usually prompts people to take a moment and reflect on the things they're grateful for - family, friends, health, you know the usual list. But in order to be truly effective, gratitude should be practiced year-round, in all aspects of our lives - and that means in the office, too! In the HCM industry, we focus a lot on employee engagement, and gratitude is a pretty influential contributing factor.

What is gratitude?

Gratitude is more than just saying thank you. According to the Harvard Medical School, gratitude is "a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives...as a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals."

Why practice gratitude?

Besides just being the "nice thing" to do, implementing a culture of gratitude can have a profound impact on your employees, which in turn can drastically improve workplace morale and productivity. Practicing gratitude leads to increased physical and mental wellness - which, in employees, leads to better work-life balance and greater job satisfaction. And when employees feel that gratitude and appreciation from their managers (and peers), it increases their productivity and mental strength. Take, for example, the study by the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, which divided some university fundraisers into two groups. The group that heard a pep talk from the director, in which she expressed her gratitude for their efforts, made 50% more fundraising calls that week than the group that did not. It was a small study, to be sure, but its implications are widely applicable to the workplace as a whole - a company that expresses gratitude should, in theory, perform better than those that don't!

How can I implement gratitude at work?

All right, you're saying, *I get it* - we need to practice gratitude at work. But how do you go about it? How do you make your gratitude effective? Getting employee engagement right is a core issue in the HCM world, so lucky for you we know a thing or two. Check out these four tips for building a culture of gratitude in your workplace that will engage your employees.

1. **Be authentic**

The key to expressing gratitude in the workplace is authenticity. As psychotherapist Amy Morin points out, "thanking people simply because a project is complete or because you feel put on the spot won't do anyone any good." Of course, we're not suggesting you throw general manners out the window. But your employees and your coworkers need to know that you actually mean what you're saying and that you care.

1. **It starts at the top**

As with all aspects of culture, the implementation of change begins with leadership. When leaders express genuine gratitude to their employees, a ripple effect occurs - because the rest of the company understands that gratitude has become important to the organization. This also gives leadership the

opportunity to reconnect with employees on a more genuine, individual level. And it gives you the chance to be creative! Showing gratitude doesn't have to take a huge chunk out of your budget - sometimes, even just a personalized note or email can do the trick. The key here is to be specific in expressing that gratitude; Eric Holtzclaw, the author of *Lean Forward,* suggests sharing a specific example of how an employee helped you and why you are grateful.

1. **Consistency is key**

Don't make it sporadic - infuse gratitude into your company culture. We all know that nothing changes in a company's culture overnight - in fact, on average it takes three years to transform the culture of an organization. Creating a work environment in which employees both feel appreciated and feel comfortable expressing their own gratitude starts with small changes. And it will achieve big results - when employees also regularly express gratitude to both their peers and their managers, that culture of gratitude will blossom. One way that we have focused on gratitude here at Viventium this year was through the #gratefulatworkchallenge. In case you missed it, our CEO Gary Trainor extended a challenge to all Viventium employees - to share what they are most grateful about at work in a video on social media, and to nominate other companies to do the same. The ongoing challenge has really gotten our employees thinking, and through their videos, they've expressed genuine gratitude - often for other people in the company.

1. **Appreciate people differently**

Know your employees (and your coworkers). Besides helping facilitate more productive day-to-day interactions, understanding how your coworkers operate will let you know the best way to express your gratitude to each individual. Each of your employees is unique, and that translates into the ways in which they want to be recognized and appreciated. As consultant Stephanie Pollack points out, it's sort of like the concept of love languages - people express gratitude the way they'd want to receive it, but everyone around them may have different preferences. So it's important to try to understand your employees and express gratitude for them in different ways - whether that's publicly thanking them in front of their coworkers in a meeting, or quietly handwriting them a note. With these tips, you can start building a productive, healthy culture of gratitude at work. So maybe this week, as you prepare for Thanksgiving and think about everything that you're grateful for in your life, take a moment to thank your employees, coworkers, and managers, too. They'll be grateful you did!

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