

How Full Is Your Bucket?

Mayer had discovered a new disease in the POW camps—a disease of extreme hopelessness. It was not uncommon for a soldier to wander into his hut and look despairingly about, deciding there was no use in trying to participate in his own survival. He would go into a corner alone, sit down, and pull a blanket over his head. The soldiers called it “give up-itis.” The doctors labeled it “mirasmus,” meaning, in Mayer’s words, “a lack of resistance, a passivity.” In the absence of motivation, they simply died, even though there was no medical justification for their deaths.

Four million employees have been surveyed worldwide. It was found that individuals who receive regular praise and recognition:

- Increase their individual productivity
- Increase engagement among their colleagues
- Are more likely to stay with their organization
- Receive high loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers
- Have better safety records and fewer accidents on the job

Instead, his primary intent is to energize the people in each workplace. As soon as he arrives, Ken casually visits with these individuals and congratulates them. He may offer kudos to an employee who recently got married or had a child or praise someone who gave a great presentation. His favorite line is: “I’ve been hearing a lot of good talk behind your back.”

According to the US Labor Department, the number one reason people leave their jobs is that they do not feel appreciated.

One study of health care workers found that when employees were working for a boss they disliked, they had significantly higher blood pressure. The boss induced hypertension, this could increase the risk of coronary heart disease by one-sixth and the risk of stroke by one-third.

It is possible for one or two people to poison an entire workplace.

They bring their negativity with them wherever they go. Negative employees can tear through a workplace like a hurricane racing through a coastal town.

Praise is rare in most workplaces. Sixty-five percent of Americans received no recognition in the workplace last year.

Most of us have grown up in a culture in which it’s much easier to tell people what they did wrong instead of praising them when they succeed. Nine out of ten people say they are more productive when they are around positive people.

The question posed to parents was: “Your child shows you the following grades, English A, Social Studies A, Biology C, and Algebra F. “Which grade deserves the most attention from you?” The vast majority of parents focus on the F. Why not start with a positive focus on the A’s before getting to the work that needs to be done with the F?

These recent studies show that negative emotions can be harmful to your health and might even shorten your life span. Negative emotions can also destroy relationships, families, and entire careers.

According to Nobel Prize winning scientist Daniel Kahneman, we experience approximately 20,000 individual moments in a waking day. Each moment last a few seconds. The memorable moments are almost always positive or negative. In some cases a single encounter can change your life forever.

The defining moment in his life occurred when a grade school teacher simply told him that she cared about him and believed in him. This one small interaction turned Brian Bennett’s life around.

“Your mother was very proud of you and so am I.” After 25 years with her company, these simple words carried more meaning than any other recognition she had received in her entire life.

John Gottman’s pioneering research on marriages suggest there is a magic ration of 5 to 1 in terms of balance of positive and negative interactions. Gottman found that marriages are significantly more likely to succeed when the couple’s interactions are near that 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative. When the ratio is 1 to 1 the marriage moves towards divorce.

A ration of 13 positives to 1 negative in the workplace can worsen things. Positivity must be grounded in reality. A “Pollyanna” approach, in which the negative is completely ignored, can result in a false optimism that is counter productive and sometimes downright annoying. There are times when it’s absolutely necessary to correct our mistakes and figure out how to manage our weaknesses.

Negative emotions can lead to serious problems. Thousands of studies have revealed the damaging results of stress, anger, and hostility on the mind and body. In contrast, positive emotions can buffer us against adverse health effects and depression. They enable faster recovery from pain, trauma, and illness. And positive emotions increase the lifespan.

Researchers who studied 839 Mayo Clinic patients over a 30 year period found a link between optimism in how people explained life events and a lower risk of early death. And a landmark study of Catholic nuns revealed that nuns with more positive emotions lived significantly longer than nuns with fewer positive emotions. The nuns who reported more positive emotions lived an average of 10 years longer. Negative emotions can cut more years off your life than cigarette smoking.

A study of Harvard graduates revealed that the way in which young men explained negative events, either positively or negatively, predicted several physical health outcomes decades later. Specifically, optimism early in life predicted good health later in life.

Optimists were found to have more T4 or “helper” cells that fight against infection. Optimists have also been found to average less than one doctor visit per year, while pessimists average more than 3.5 visits per year. Increasing positive emotions in your life might help to minimize healthcare costs.

When I was young, I remember Don saying that we should gather to celebrate all the great things that a person has done-while they are still around to be part of the celebration.

A popular saying in my home was the age-old maxim: “Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and it annoys the pig.” As a young student, I found this quite liberating. I didn’t have to be good at everything. Instead, I was able to strive for greatness in my areas of natural talent.

Recognition is most appreciated and effective when it is individualized, specific and deserved. Generic, one-size-fits-all awards don’t work. Neither does recognition that seems forced or false.

If you want people to understand that you value their contributions and they are important, the recognition and praise you provide must have meaning that is specific to each individual.

Our study of workplaces found that having “friends,” “good friends,” or “close friends,” on the job was as important as having a best friend at work. People with best friends at work had better safety records, receive high customer satisfaction scores, and increase workplace productivity.

Great relationships lead to a significant increase in life satisfaction. Noted psychologist Ed Diener found that “The happiest people have high quality social relationships.” On the other hand, Diener and other researchers have found that lonely people suffer psychologically.

Start by learning the names of the people you see regularly-and for each one, make sure you learn the name he or she prefers to be called. Sure, this may seem like a small thing, but it can make a major impression. It’s tough to build relationships until you know someone by name. Your acquaintances may soon become friends.

According to a recent poll, the vast majority of people prefer gifts that are unexpected. In your own interactions look for opportunities to give small gifts to others out of the blue.

