

The ACTIV²E Leadership Model, Part 1

Appreciation

ACTIV²E Leadership recognizes the critical role leadership plays within all organizations and provides a simple construct for leaders to remember critical components of the human part of leadership. In this essay, we'll start our discussions of the ACTIV²E Leadership model with A – *Appreciation*. It is the easiest, but it is most often underused.

Appreciation programs are used for two reasons: first, to show members you approve of and want to reward their performance. The second reason is a consequence of the first: to enhance performance. A robust and focused appreciation program will enhance performance.

People join organizations for a variety of reasons. In the military, people are attracted to organizations for tangible benefits such as education assistance, job training, pension benefits, or health insurance. Tangible benefits can mean as much and sometimes more than job satisfaction. Further, tangible benefits are readily measurable – both to the wallet of the employee and to what their perceived value is to society.

There are also intangible benefits such as the opportunity to serve, status, power, or the allure of working in a specialty in which one has been interested. Intangible benefits are also important, and depending on how secure one feels in having one's material needs met, it can eclipse tangible benefits as priorities.

Awards and recognition programs satisfy many tangible and intangible needs of the employee. Awards and recognition enhance the employees' perception of security. The more one feels secure in the job, the more intangibles mean; the tangible symbols and rewards of formal recognition contribute to security. The intangible aspect of the ego stroke contributes to the job satisfaction of the members.

Maslow

"Wait a minute," you say, "what's all this about security needs and satisfaction levels?"

Abraham Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs for human satisfaction. Maslow posited that there is a sequence to satisfaction that must be followed¹. As one level of needs is met, a higher level of needs can be satisfied. For instance, it makes little sense to have a TV and satellite dish if you don't have a roof over your head.

Maslow's hierarchy has five levels: physiological, safety and security, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Do you see the logic of the sequence?

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is crucial to our discussion of appreciation because it introduces logic to the process of determining how best to meet one's and one's subordinates' needs. Let's

just take a minute to examine each level of needs. For those who are already familiar with Maslow's hierarchy, consider this a brief review.

Physiological Needs

Physiological needs deal with the most basic needs for human survival: food, shelter, oxygen, water, and environment. It is the most basic measure of human fulfillment.

Safety/Security Needs

This addresses the human need for protection against danger and threat. These dangers can come from the environment, organizations, animals, and humans. Safety issues can involve crime, recessions, and physical dangers. It is the first level of psychological needs and is critical. One doesn't have to BE in danger to FEEL in danger. When one FEELS in danger, nearly everything else is subordinate.

Social Needs

Once basic physiological and security needs are taken care of, the individual can begin to look outside of themselves. They begin to look for social reinforcement – the development of peer groups at work, and the building of respect.

It is here where awards and recognition really begin to do their work. Most often, recognition helps build acceptance within a peer group. There is a basic need in all of us to be recognized and appreciated for our efforts. It's a powerful motivator for leaders to harness if they want their people to go to the next level.

Esteem needs

Awards and recognition also fill esteem needs. Esteem refers as much to one's view of themselves as well as how others view them.

If someone is given only negative feedback – or no feedback whatsoever – there is little motivation to progress. The person may feel their contributions are unwanted or insufficient, and in time their feeling of self-worth decreases. People leave when they feel they aren't wanted. When this happens, corporate knowledge goes with them.

Self-Actualization Needs

This category refers to the highest level in the hierarchy in which one desires to have a purpose in life, and to fulfill that purpose. The individual taps all their talent and potential towards that goal. It is being satisfied with one's life and the journey within that life. This level cannot be accomplished until all other needs are met.

As a leader, should you worry about self-actualization needs? Yes, but... awards and appreciation really talk to security, social, and esteem needs.

As a leader, you must meet the lower-level needs of your people before you can satisfy higher-level needs. For instance, a member must feel secure in their position before you can really affect their esteem. This doesn't diminish the needs to show appreciation and develop their esteem and social standing within the organization; but it does give you an idea of how to focus your efforts.

Formal and Informal Appreciation

True appreciation programs, formal or informal, are based on merit. Merit builds value (performance). There are countless ways to show employees/members appreciation for their performance. True limitations are cost of the measures and the commitment of the leader.

Informal Appreciation

Former CAP National Commander, Brig Gen Richard L. Anderson – knows the power of informal appreciation well. He loves to write notes to anyone over anything to tell them he appreciates what they do.

For instance, he wrote to every CAP cadet who earned CAP's highest award for cadet achievement and was promoted to Cadet Colonel. Imagine for a minute being a 16, 17, or 18-year old kid getting a handwritten letter of congratulations from "the General."

The simple sincere "Thank you" is a great way to show your appreciation. It shows that you noticed – particularly if it's done right away; and besides, it's good manners. E-mail notes with copies to your bosses are even better, because it spreads the word that you have someone good working for you.

Other forms of "informal" appreciation (though they could be included formal programs) are coins, gift certificates, a Friday pizza lunch (for a group), etc. Anything that shows you've noticed their good work. By the way, it also reflects well on you. It shows that you look outside of yourself to notice and respect others. In return, you'll be more respected by your subordinates, your peers, and your boss.

Formal Appreciation

Formal appreciation programs can be as simple or as complex as you want them to be. The local grocery offers an Employee of the Month with the employees' picture at the front of the store and a plaque. The Boeing Company offers everything from certificates to cash bonuses to free days off. The Air Force offers spot promotions to enlisted personnel (called STEP promotions), cash incentives for suggestions, medals for performance and conduct, and other awards.

As you know, CAP has an extensive formal awards and decorations program. Beyond certificates and ribbons, CAP also has awards recognizing outstanding performance in each of the mission areas as well as annual awards for exceptional staff service. These awards are easy to start into the pipeline. For instance, any member can recommend any other member for CAP achievement Award or other commendation using the CAP Form 120. Same's true for lifesaving

and valor awards. It's not hard at all, all that's required is first-hand knowledge, supporting documentation, and a few minutes to write a well-thought paragraph or two about the event.

Whatever the method, when used well, formal recognition/appreciation programs offer opportunities for both the boss and member. For the member, it offers tangible proof of performance. For the boss, when used well, recognition/appreciation programs will enhance the performance and morale of all members. The mission is accomplished quicker, the goals met faster, and the bottom line is enhanced. Investments pay off.

Six Simple Rules About Appreciation Programs

There are six simple rules to remember when constructing an appreciation program. It can be summarized as: MEMBER.

Make it comprehensive

Ensure everyone can play

Make it count

Build value in the program

Ensure everyone does play

Resonate a culture of appreciation

Make It Comprehensive

A good appreciation program recognizes all types of achievement for all durations. Since one of the main objectives of an appreciation program is to enhance performance; recognition of good performance and effort is key.

Recognition and appreciation can touch employee conduct off the job as well. A formal letter of congratulations or certificate of accomplishment to reward a member for getting an advanced degree or certification not required for the job, for example; it shows you approve of their development. So too would formal recognition of a member's civic activities.

On the job recognition should be for short and long-term accomplishments, exceptional completion of special projects, or for sustained performance. The point is to give the members many opportunities to succeed, and show they are valued more than as the revenue they generate.

There is, however, a fine line: while you want the program to be comprehensive, you don't want it so easy so as to diminish its meaning. Don't be stingy, but don't pass awards out like peanuts in a ballpark either. Preserve its value.

Ensure Everyone Can Play

To build a truly comprehensive recognition/appreciation program, as many members as possible should be eligible to participate. Lately, it's become fashionable in some areas to say that once a member reaches a certain level, they shouldn't need to be included because they are already well recognized. But that just doesn't make sense. While formal recognition/appreciation programs use tangible rewards, it's done to build the spirit of the member and the team and enhance their performance. Most of the benefit is in the mind of the receiver – or potential receivers. Why shoot yourself in the foot by saying some people *can't* be thanked?

Make It Count

Sincerity is key. A recognition/appreciation program should not be started because some leadership recipe calls for it. It should be done because the leadership really believes it will enhance performance and that it's the right thing to do for the members. If the effort is not sincere, it won't succeed, no matter how much money is thrown at it.

Build Value in the Program

Appreciation programs (from a follower's viewpoint) build value in two ways. First, they build tangible value. The forms of appreciation selected reflect a commitment of the *organization's* value.

The second way recognition/appreciation programs build value: intangibly through showing genuine interest in members and genuine recognition for the roles they play in the success of the organization (back to the sincerity we discussed briefly).

Ensure Everyone Does Play

Have you worked in places where the bosses didn't put their people in for awards. Notionally, there are three reasons for this:

1. They just didn't think about it.
2. There was a problem within the department, and the boss thought that if people were rewarded in the midst of the problems, it would be viewed as condoning the problems.
3. The boss felt that the system itself was unfair since not everyone was eligible; and to spare the feelings of those whom the system left out, no one would be recognized.

Certainly the first reason is the least complicated. The boss who doesn't think about it – from a follower's perspective – is missing a powerful motivation tool and may exhibit a lack of emotional intelligence.

It's more useful to examine the last two reasons because they are more complex. Working in, or leading a problem department is a challenge indeed. It's admirable for anyone rising to take the reins of a department or unit in troubled times. The boss must clearly delineate expectations for success, as well as to spell out what behavior is unacceptable.

That said, to issue a blanket policy which has the effect of preventing recognition of members who do well – even in troubled times, is flawed.

In fact, it may be here where awards and recognition can be especially useful. It's an extremely visible and flexible way to highlight successful behaviors without coming off as "preachy." Most members in a troubled department want to do the right thing and want to be successful, all they need is to be shown the way. Those recognized or awarded provide an example for others to emulate. As they begin to view themselves as successful, they build on that momentum.

The last reason is the most complex. It's hard to leave people out – especially when everyone is performing well. Whether this is a good strategy is more dependent on how all your members feel. It's not a decision to be taken unilaterally. And, regardless of the decision reached by the group (democratic style of leadership), if the boss truly feels the system is unfair it is also incumbent on the boss to work to change the system to one that is equitable for all members.

Resonate a Culture of Appreciation

This brings us to resonating a culture of appreciation – where the formal and informal pieces come together. To be emotionally intelligent enough to know it's always okay to thank someone for their work. To breed the culture up and laterally as well as down the hierarchy. To be aware enough to thank someone, help someone, appreciate someone when no one else is looking or would ever know.

So what's the punch line? You don't need a lot of money, you don't need a lot of people, what you need is the will and the sincerity. Remember the MEMBER!

Notes

1. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd ed., Harper & Row, 1970.