

Anatomy of An Effective Compliment

5 Key Components That Transform Compliments From Prattle To Powerful

By Kendall C. Wright, President of Entelechy Training and Development, Inc.

Can you think of something that everyone enjoys, even requires on some level, but not many people do well? In addition to that creative list of things you've just put together, consider the act of giving a compliment. Specifically, how to compliment your direct reports on performing a work related task in an extraordinary way.

Hollow and ineffective expressions of "appreciation" are common place in today's workplace. The ubiquitous, anemic, and menacing "Nice Job" is perhaps the grandest of offenders. It is assumed that such a superficial statement has the power to inspire associates to higher levels of contribution, self-esteem, and overall sense of being valued. But in reality, statements like Nice Job, Good Job, and Way to Go, serve only as a box checking activity for the leader. In the end, those statements leave the associate feeling trivialized, empty, and disengaged.

The nonnegotiable precursor of an authentic compliment is that the associate has performed specific tasks, in a specific manner, worthy of duplication, if not emulation. When complimenting someone on a task well done, it is important to remember this key point, a compliment highlights the specific behavior the leader what's the associated to duplicate in the future. If the associate isn't clear on the specific behavior, they won't have clarity regarding what needs to be duplicated. No clarity guarantees a short-lived moment of feeling good, but a high likelihood of non-repeatability.

Beyond identifying the specific behavior, the leader must articulate how the behavior is advantageous. Telling the associate how the behavior served the actualization of the mission and/or vision reinforces the team's awareness of each.

In the workplace, no compliment is complete without a thank you. Thanking the individual for going out of his or her way, or above and beyond, is just a nice and powerful way to acknowledge their contribution. Saying thank you prompts respect and enhances the quality of the leadership relationship.

Taking time to master the art of the effective compliment should be a mandatory undertaking for all leaders striving to create an engaging and inclusive environment. Here are the pertinent components of a powerful compliment:

Personal. Use the person's name. Dale Carnegie got this one correct, "A person's name is to that person, the sweetest, most important sound in any language."

Identify Specific Behaviors/Actions. This helps the receiving party to clarify what needs to be replicated.

Relate To Mission/Vision. This shows why the behavior is important.

Encourage Replication. It may sound like common sense, but it is important to let the receiving party know that you want them to continue to demonstrate the specific behavior.

Thank Them. This lets your direct report know his or her contribution isn't just noticed, but that it is genuinely appreciated.

Here's an example: *Ryan, I want to let you know I appreciate how you handled that situation with the Claymont account. Your attention to details like the PO number discrepancy, and your patience in reiterating the EFT procedure really demonstrated your commitment to excellence in serving our customers. That's how we remain a world class operation. Thank you for being a true professional.*

The efficacy and advantages of positive reinforcement are there for the taking when a leader chooses to deliver fully appointed compliments. Given that leaders are, in fact, sculptors of the environment, the fully appointed compliment is, indeed, one of their favorite tools.

Actualizing Leadership Lesson: Everyone loves a compliment, but not every compliment is created equal. In the workplace, compliments are power tools to reinforce behavior and sculpt culture. But ineffective compliments, mere hollow platitudes, do very little by way of identifying what needs to be replicated and why that behavior is valued by the leader, the team, or the organization. Leaders who master the art of the fully appointed compliment can expect in return to have more fully engaged, productive, and profitable associates.

©Kendall C. Wright

Kendall C. Wright, "The Actualizer," CEO of Entelechy T&D, Inc., helps business leaders -at all levels- fulfill the hard parts of their job descriptions. He is the author of *Affirming and Confirming SuccessFUL Living* and most recently released *Conversations On Success*, featuring insights from Les Brown, James Kouzes and other top tier international speakers. Find free resources at www.EntelechyCan.com. Contact us at Kendall@EntelechyCan.com or 513.860.4934.