Eric P. Bloom: Don’t take best people for granted

By Eric P. Bloom
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Have you ever heard the expression “The squeaky wheel gets the oil”? If you haven’t, it basically means that you have to speak up if you want something. It’s a lesson in assertiveness. This is great advice if you are the wheel (well, person) that wants or needs the oil, but is very risky if you are the oil provider.

As a manager, it can be very damaging to your department if you spend all your management time with only the following types of squeaky wheels:

- Those who continually crave attention just because they like it
- Those who are underperforming and require your ongoing continual attention
- Those who are overly attentive to you in hopes of future promotions and raises

It’s easy to get caught up in the trap of only spending time with those on your team who seem to require it and accidentally neglect those who quietly do a great job day in and day out. These quiet performers tend to be self motivated, self controlled, and in some ways self managing. The problem is that because they don’t need your attention daily, it’s easy to take them for granted and not provide them with the attention they deserve. If this happens, your best performers may begin to feel neglected, which is de-motivating, reduces their loyalty to you and the company, and in time, may find other employment.
I have personally been on both sides of this coin. I have been the hard working employee who felt ignored. I have also been the manager who spent so much time trying to raise the performance of his weaker team members that his best performers felt a little ignored. When I was the employee, I eventually left. When I was the manager, I fortunately realized how my best performers were unhappy with me before they left and was able to correct the situation. That said, it was a close call and I learned the valuable management lesson that I am now explaining to you.

My suggestion to you is as a manager; remember to pay attention to everyone on your team. This doesn’t mean treat them all the same exact way or spend equal time with each person. It means give each person what they need based on your ability to provide support and the time you have for this type of activity.

That said, try to touch base with each of your employees at least once a week for something positive, such as:

- Tell them they did a great job on a presentation they made
- Thanking them for working so hard to keep a client that was at risk
- Congratulate them for finishing a hard project on time and within budget
- Or whatever else seems to be appropriate at the time

These simple interactions don’t take much time or effort, but they can have a wonderful impact on these who work for you. Think about it. How would you feel if your boss came to your office just to say you did a great job on something? That’s how the people working for you will feel when you show them that you appreciate their work. My one caution on taking this approach is to be real.

- Don’t congratulate people for things that did not go well, only to say something nice, they will know it and feel patronized, which is actually worse than being ignored
- If someone does something poorly, you can still tell them you appreciate their efforts and take this opportunity to give them guidance and explain how to better handle the poorly executed situations in the future
In closing, the real lesson here is that at the end of the day, your top performing employees are of great value to your company, your department, and to you. If you appreciate their great work, let them know. It will help keep them motivated, help them feel appreciated, and help keep them working for you.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- It’s easy to accidently ignore your top performers because they don’t require as much oversight, mentoring and attention.
- If you do ignore your best performers, they may begin to feel neglected, which is demotivating, reduces their loyalty to you and the company, and in time, may find other employment.

For additional information on today’s topic, I suggest the book *Engaging the Hearts and Minds of All Your Employees: How to Ignite Passionate Performance for Better Business Results* by Lee Colan.

Until next time, manage well, manage smart, and continue to grow.

**Author Bio:**

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