

PRAISE IN PUBLIC, CRITIQUE IN PRIVATE

Generational and Personality Differences Affect How Praise and Critique is Received

By Todd Uterstaedt, SPHR, CPLP

THE PLATITUDE is well known among managers: "Praise in public, critique in private." But its implementation is not as simple as it sounds. Often, managers can miss the mark when giving praise or critiques.

Today, we have four generations in the workforce - Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, GenXers and GenY — all of whom view this topic of praise in public, critique in private differently. Many GenY employees who are just entering the workforce want constant feedback, while Baby Boomers may not necessarily operate in the same way and may see this as coddling. Yet, research has shown that GenY employees have a very similar work ethic as that of Baby Boomers. Both generations are very goal- and objective-oriented, GenY employees just need to be approached differently.

Additionally, the manner in which employees would prefer to receive this praise or critique varies according to personality. For instance, Jane, an employee with a communicative personality, likes to motivate and bring people together. She may enjoy public praise, but wish for her critique to be in private while balanced with some praise. Bob, an employee with an administrative personality may be into facts, logic and analyzing, and he may be uncomfortable with praise in public. When Bob is critiqued, he wants specific examples in order to improve. Recognizing the traits of Jane and Bob can affect the outcome of their praise or critique.

Knowing what generation your employee hails from is simple enough. But short of administering a personality test - like The Birkman, Myers-Briggs or DiSC - how does a manager determine the needs and motivators of their employees? Simply by asking.

Don't be afraid to ask your employees how they like to be praised or critiqued. This will provide you with a benchmark. You can also learn about an employee's personality by observing them — such as noting how they negotiate, their mottos for living, or what books they read. Next, ask your employees: "If you were to critique or praise yourself, what would you say and how would you go about

doing it?" This helps you determine your best delivery.

The way in which you execute praise or criticism is what makes it work.

It is also important not to confuse praise in public with feedback. Sometimes people think that if they say nice things about a person in public, they're offering feedback. Feedback, however, is thoughtful and processed information that is fair and balanced. It could be either in the form of critique or praise. Effective feedback helps individuals understand and build upon their natural strengths.

Managers and leaders who understand these generational and personality differences and tailor their communication accordingly,

can positively affect motivation. Employees need to feel that praise or critique is sincere, valid and meaningful. Employee personality styles influence these perceptions. As a manager, if you are able to recognize and act upon employee's individual motivators you can successfully increase the engagement of your employees in their jobs, netting positive results for your organization.

So go ahead praise in public and critique in private, as long as you understand how to make it fit your individual employees.©

Todd Uterstaedt is president and CEO of Baker and Daboll a executive coaching firm in Mason.

A Look At The Generations

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TRADITIONALISTS (VETERANS) *Born between 1922-1945*

In general, they tend to shun public praise and critique and would rather receive private praise and critique as long as it is genuine, substantive, and backed up with some accurate data and more formal mechanisms. If you do intend to publicly praise a traditionalist, try to keep it short and to the point.

BABY BOOMERS *Born between 1946-1964*

In general, boomers are competitive and optimistic about making things happen and enjoy some publicity here and there about their accomplishments. They may not appear to be as appreciative or as focused on feedback. But, when they do they tend to question authority so make sure your praise and critiques are seen as coming from you, personally, and not necessarily you, the "all knowing" manager. Focus on face-to-face communications.

GENERATION X *Born between 1965-1980*

In general, they are pretty self-reliant, resourceful, adaptive and maybe a bit skeptical. They also tend to be a bit more informal. These are important things to remember when it comes to praise and critique. They may appreciate more informal praise and critique rather than organizational, system generated processes. Allowing them to drive the feedback session is a bit more empowering to them. Freedom is often the best reward for them. Less judgement and more discussion is often appealing to them.

GENERATION Y (MILLENNIALS) *Born between 1981-2000*

In general, they hunger for guidance, feedback, mentoring, training, development, and collaboration. The frequency of praise and critique is an issue. Multiple platforms are also an issue (i.e. phone, voicemail, email, text messaging, online chat, etc.) Consider regularly scheduled coaching sessions and augment them with irregular and impromptu praise and critique using different communication vehicles. They expect respect, so try to be measured in your approach. Focus on how they can make a difference.