



## What is Wrong with a Little Encouragement?

I wake up to CNN and hear ...“Barak Obama Wins the Nobel Peace Prize !”. I immediately ask myself .... “He won what? Why?”

I am an Obama Girl so I listen for the reason. The newscaster says he was presented the prize to encourage his pursuit of a more peaceful world. I am fully awake and think, “Now, this is interesting.” This announcement set off a firestorm of debate about whether or not the President deserved the prize. As I reflected on previous winners I understood the debate. However, as I continued thinking it occurred to me – “What is wrong with giving the brother a little encouragement? He has a really tough job to do.”

The power of encouragement is incredibly underestimated. Many leaders believe once employees are told what to do they should just do it. I respectfully challenge this philosophy because I don’t believe it works. As an observer of what contributes to employee morale and motivation I notice the power of encouragement in the workplace. I believe it is the critical factor that inspires employees to move from working at good to working at great. Something powerful happens when employees hear, “You are doing a great job. Keep going,” or, “It’s all right, I trust you,” or, “I encourage you to communicate openly about the challenges connected to this project.” Encouragement is one of the most powerful tools a leader has in terms of motivating employees.

There are many ways to encourage employees. I’ve noticed three types of encouragement in particular make a difference. First, encourage communication about difficulties related to projects. Projects often stall as a result of employees not speaking about difficulties that inevitably arise. This is such an important business issue research has been conducted about the impact of silence on projects. Findings indicate when leaders encourage communication, project implementation becomes easier and outcomes are achieved. Don’t assume employees know it is okay to tell you everything. If they are not encouraged to do so, they won’t.

Encourage self trust. Last month’s column focused on leading during difficult times. Remember, employees are working through difficult times too. Today’s workplace is full of ambiguity. Ambiguity knocks employees for a loop. They feel uncertain and unsure. This leads to a lack of self trust. A lack of self trust contributes to poor performance and business outcomes. Leaders can help by discussing the importance of sustaining self trust especially during difficult times. Give employees assignments and encourage them to move full steam ahead. Define parameters and encourage employees to make decisions and elegant mistakes. Create an atmosphere of confidence and encourage employees to step right into it. This type of encouragement restores self trust and motivates employees to work hard even in the midst of hard times.

Finally, encourage employees to actively seek support from you and co-workers. Many employees, especially mid-managers, isolate themselves based on old beliefs that successful employees get it done all alone. I don’t think leadership or day-to-day work is something that should be done alone. Employees benefit from having someone to discuss workplace issues with. Encourage employees to serve as each other’s peer coaches and process partners. Together they will generate richer ideas, solutions and innovations for the workplace.

Honestly, what is really wrong with offering a little encouragement? Nothing when it increases employee morale and motivation. Take time to offer encouragement to employees. I guarantee you will be pleasantly surprised by the power encouraging words have on employees and business outcomes. Onward and Upward leaders!