

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

## GIVING PRAISE EXERCISE

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### ABSTRACT

This exercise on employee motivation is designed for courses in Organizational Behavior. The exercise focuses on the use of praise as a way of enhancing employee job performance. The objective of the exercise, materials needed, and specific instructions to participants are presented. A suggested approach for debriefing the exercise is also given as is a list of relevant readings.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most common, effective, and inexpensive approaches to motivation is that of giving praise. Yet few managers understand the characteristics of effective praise, nor are they aware of the different forms praise can take. This exercise explores a number of different aspects of the use of praise.

### EXERCISE

#### Objectives:

There are four major objectives of this exercise. They are:

1. To provide participants with an understanding of the characteristics of effective praise.
2. To provide participants with an understanding of the benefits to be gained from praising employees.
3. To provide participants with feedback regarding the type of praise they and others give.
4. To provide participants with feedback regarding the type of praise they and others like to receive.

#### Materials Needed:

Two sheets of paper and one pen or pencil per participant.

#### Instructions:

The instructions for the exercise are given below:

1. All participants should take out two sheets of paper. Each should then think of two people whom they have praised (or believe are praiseworthy) within the last month. These people can be subordinates, co-workers or friends.
2. Each participant should then write down what they said to each of the two people whom they praised. If a participant has not actually praised anyone within the last month or can't remember what was said in praise, he or she should write down the praise which would be appropriate for each of the two people. A separate sheet of paper

should be used for the praise statements directed at each of the two people. Participants should not use the real name of the person they praised. Also, the participant's own name should not appear anywhere on either of the two sheets of paper.

3. Participants should now divide themselves into groups of five to six. Each group should then combine their praise statements and trade them with another group. Each group will now have praise statements written by members of another group.
4. The next step is for one member of each group to read aloud, one at a time, the praise statements. Each statement should then be discussed by the group. The discussion should focus on: (A) How would you feel if the praise statement had been made about you? (B) How effective do you feel the praise statement would be in motivating the employee or in improving the employee's job satisfaction? (C) Why is the praise statement effective or ineffective? (D) How could the praise statement be improved?
5. After all groups have discussed each of the praise statements, a representative of each group should present, to all of the participants, the general conclusions reached within the group regarding (A) the general effectiveness of the praise statements discussed, (B) the characteristics of effective praise statements.

### DEBRIEFING THE EXERCISE

Participants differ considerably in terms of the ease with which they write praise statements. Some can easily think of people whom they have praised recently and can write down what they have said to them quickly. Others can't remember having praised anyone recently, nor can they think of anyone who is praiseworthy. They have difficulty starting and completing the writing tasks. A good starting point for debriefing the exercise is to point out these differences to participants and state why these differences exist.

One of the objectives of the exercise is to provide participants with feedback regarding their own use of praise. Since at the conclusion of the exercise, all of the participants will have discussed and evaluated the praise statements of others during the exercise, they are now able to reflect on the effectiveness of their own praise statements. The instructor may want to encourage participants to do this early in the debriefing. Participants could be asked to rewrite their praise statements during this phase of the discussion.

Numerous points typically surface when one participant from each group presents the conclusions reached by the group. Among them are:

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1. Supervisors frequently do not know how to give praise. They have trouble giving it.
2. Supervisors differ in terms of how they give praise. They differ in terms of both the focus (personality, behavior, results) and the type of praise they give. (judgmental, rational, emotional). (See Appendix 1).
3. While there are many options available to managers in terms of the focus and type of praise (Appendix 1), most managers only use a few of them in practice.
4. Employees differ in terms of the type and focus of praise they want to receive.
5. Supervisors don't always provide employees with the type and focus of praise they want to receive.
6. For praise to be maximally effective, managers should match the type and focus of the praise they give with that which the employees want to receive.
7. Praise is most effective when it is sincere, timely, and associated with task performance over which the employee has control.

Participants may be interested in fully analyzing their praise statements. Appendix 1 is often helpful in this regard. Some instructors may find it useful to ask students to categorize all of the praise statements within their groups in terms of the 12 groupings in Appendix 1. A tabulation of all of the praise statements can then be made to (A) determine similarities and differences across participants in terms of the type of praise statements they give and (B) to reinforce points 2-6 above.

The issue of when praise should be given is often raised. The answers suggested by behavior modification can be cited at this point:

1. In general, to improve employee productivity, praise when improvement occurs (continuous reinforcement schedule).
2. In general, to maintain high employee productivity, use "intermittent" praise.
  - A. Praise particularly outstanding achievements.
  - B. Praise employees for successful completion of critical aspects of their job.

Another issue raised by this exercise is: why should supervisors praise employees? Instructors can (if they desire) tie in the use of praise with any or all of the current motivation theories, e.g., Maslow, Herzberg, equity theory, expectancy theory, and behavior modification. Among the general points that can be made are:

1. Employees want recognition and a feeling of being appreciated. Giving praise may improve employee job satisfaction.
2. Praise may help increase employee productivity or maintain it at satisfactory levels.
3. Praise may enhance the employee's image of the supervisor. As a result, the supervisor's referent power may increase.

This exercise can be completed within a 50 minute class period. However, 90 minutes may be required if all of the

options suggested here are utilized.

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## APPENDIX 1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK TO EMPLOYEES

<u>Types of Feedback</u>	<u>Focus of Feedback</u>		<u>Consequences of Employee's Behavior to</u>	
	<u>Employee's Personality</u>	<u>Employee's Behavior</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Supervisor</u>
Judgmental/ Evaluative	Your initiative on the job is excellent,  -or-  I'm proud of your sense of responsibility.	Your sales record is better than anyone else's in this department.	You are excellent at determining what needs to be done on your job and doing it. This helps keep cost down.	You are excellent at determining what needs to be done on your job and doing it. This helps me because then I can devote my time to solving other problems which come up.
Rational/Factual	You demonstrate initiative on the job,	You have a perfect attendance record this month,	Your suggestion saved the company \$7,000.	The planning work you do to determine what needs to be done helps me. It enables me to devote my time to solving other problems.
Feelings	I like it when you take the initiative on the job.	I always feel relieved when I'm arriving at work and see your office door open (or your car in the parking lot),	I'm delighted that ours is the most cost-effective unit in this organization,	I like the way you determine what needs to be done on the job and then doing it. I appreciate it. It helps me because I can devote my time to solving other problems which come up.