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What's Your Praise Quotient?

How well does your company manage praise for employees and managers? Does it have systems in place, does it reach out to find ways to praise, does it search out new vehicles for getting and giving praise?

Authors, Chip and Dale Heath, ask questions like these in an article that examines some costs and benefits of praise at work. For starters, they cite one large study showing 40% of employees gave lack of recognition as their reason for quitting their jobs. So praise has economic consequences, as well as warm and fuzzy feelings.

And, here's an interesting twist added by the writers: Customers get a good feeling when they know their praise has reached the person who most deserves it. They cite studies showing all of us get a good feeling when we can express gratitude. And, those good feelings can last for as long as a month. If those people are customers, expressing gratitude about someone in your company will no doubt increase their loyalty.

How do you capture and pass on that praise to the right person? That, admit the Heaths, is a tough question. They give several examples in which companies have made a start. For example, the company that handles the "How's My Driving" calls on the back of trucks found about 18% of callers compliment rather than complain. And, the company passes along recordings of those compliments to the drivers who earned them.

Still, the Heaths concede these efforts are just a step in the right direction, and they're still looking for the perfect answer (if one exists). And just for the record, surveys don't help; they're impersonal and end up being aggregated information.

So, the stakes are high and it's worth aiming for this modern-day Holy Grail, a target that's good for everyone: customer, employee, manager, and company. **(Made to Stick: Why Companies Should Pave the Way to Praise, FastCompany, September 17, 2008)**

Are all salesmen fast-talking back slappers? Are all librarians old maids? Are all accountants logical, unemotional fellows? Are all top executives hard driving, cigar-chewing types? Are all scientists bookish men who wear glasses? Stereotypes are seldom accurate and can be downright damaging, as any man who has supervised other men knows. Talent for a particular job sometimes comes wrapped in unexpected packages.

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Achieving Change

So, you and your team have spent days brainstorming, arguing, wrestling with big and little pictures, prioritized, assigned, documented, and flushed out the implications of your new plan.

But, will it get done, will it be implemented?

As we all know, creating the plan is just the start, and now it's time to start rolling that boulder up the mountain. Here are a few suggestions to help you do that:

- 👑 The CEO or direct leader has to be absolutely committed to the plan. Beyond the obvious, this means the people responsible for developing the plan have to be fully committed, themselves. After all, you can't expect a senior exec to sign on if you're not committed to it. And, of course, if employees sense any wavering by their leaders, they'll only commit half-heartedly, which is not enough.
- 👑 Make the plan part of a larger, more comprehensive plan or strategy. If your company has a five-year plan, hook into it. Articulate why *your* plan matters, how it supports the bigger plan, and what this plan means to the organization, as a whole.
- 👑 Discuss it often. It's not just things that get measured get done, but also things that get attention. Don't let the project be forgotten, or shifted into the Things to Do, Someday, When There's Time pile.
- 👑 Astronaut James Reilly has three critical questions: "Do you have a plan? Is it working? And are you ahead or behind?" Let's consider each of them in turn, starting with

"Do you have a plan?" The answer, obviously, is "Yes" in this case (and assuming you've got a commitment, you've given it a big-picture context, and you discuss it often).

Second question: "Is it working?": Part of your commitment to the plan, and part of your leadership function involves ongoing assessments. By staying on top of the plan's implementation schedule, you're keeping it from withering on the vine.

Third question: Are you ahead or behind? If you're ahead, identify what it is about the plan itself or the implementation team that's made a difference. For example, if progress (or lack of it) is because of the work of a particular person, you will want to ensure she doesn't get assigned elsewhere before the plan is implemented. If it's not working, who, what resources, and how much time are needed to get back on track?

One final thought, from Christopher Gardner, author of *The Pursuit of Happyness*, "optimism is fine, but more important than optimism is having a plan and being committed to it." (**Knowing Things Need to Change is Only Half the Battle**, *CIO magazine*, September 14, 2008)

Crafty Interview Questions

Another day, another interview, and the same old questions drawing the same old answers? Well, how about spicing up your interviews with questions which will be unexpected, and have the potential to bring in revealing answers. These questions come from CEOs who've beat the averages when it comes to hiring great people:

- 👑 "What would be your theme song?" (from Nicole Loftus of Zorch);
- 👑 "Can you pull the weight of three people?" (from George Tunis, Hardwire);
- 👑 "What is on your bookshelf?" (from Vikram Chalana of Winshuttle);
- 👑 "Do you have a problem filling in as janitor for a day?" (Andrew B. Dwyer, DVS Group);
- 👑 "Define integrity." (from Josef Schmidt of Canvas on Demand);
- 👑 "Who needs you?" (from Brian Cork, Brian Cork Human Capital); and
- 👑 "What do you want to be when you grow up?" (from Gene McCubbin, Pop Labs)

(CEO Survey: *The Hot Seat, Inc. Magazine*, September 2008)

What Do You Expect of People?

For most retailers, holding onto just 50% of their people after one year is a success. At Costco, though, they keep 93% after the first year; that's remarkable for any type of business.

Fred Kiel, a consultant and co-author of *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success*, thinks he knows why. He says companies like Costco have rejected the idea of Economic Man. That is the idea people are driven only by self-interest and always make rational decisions.

When businesses adopt that perspective, they treat their employees in the wrong ways, with unproductive management practices. For example, information is guarded carefully, leaving most employees feeling that they are not trusted. Then there are the compliance policies, and sometimes even the compliance police, who rigidly enforce the rules. Compassion may be considered a weakness. In turn, employees are less productive and less loyal. Talk about vicious cycles!

On the other hand, Kiel argues that in the right environment, employees will have their employers' best interests at heart, and they will use emotional intelligence as well as logic in making decisions. (**How Business Pays for its View of Human Nature**, *BusinessWeek*, September 25, 2008)





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Ice Dams

Don't Let Harsh Winter "Leak" Indoors

The harsh winter weather brings an added worry to many of the nation's homeowners, according to housing experts at HouseMaster, a home inspection company. "The problem is 'ice dams,' and it often results in hundreds of phone calls from harried homeowners who have water leaking into their homes from their roofs," says Mike Kuhn, HouseMaster's director of home inspections.

Ice dams form when snow begins to melt on the roof surface. "Attic heat rises to the highest peak, causing the snow to melt," explains Kuhn. As the melting snow runs down the roof surface, colder conditions at the lower point of the roof or overhang cause the runoff to freeze, thereby forming an ice dam. "The ice acts as a dam, causing additional snowmelt to back up the roof – as much as four feet or more – and force its way under the

roofing and into the house. That's when we get the calls," says Kuhn.

The damage from ice dams, Kuhn says, can range from a one-time drip and stain to chronic leakage, expanding staining and ultimately, damage to gutters and downspouts, siding, wall and ceiling surfaces, insulation and/or structural components (which can often be undetectable to the untrained eye). Interior finishes, such as wallpaper and carpeting, as well as furnishings, are also likely to be damaged with any long term or recurring situation, Kuhn adds.

The Worst Isn't Over When the Snow Starts Melting

As long as there is a one-inch snow covering on the roof and subfreezing temperatures for three or four days, ice dams can occur. "Generally, the deeper the snow, whether from a single snowfall or by accumulation, as well as



low and persistent freezing temperatures, the more likely you are to experience severe ice dams,” says Kuhn.

Kuhn says that any temporary warm spells shouldn't lull home-owners into a false sense of relief from the potential damage of ice dams. While heat loss is most often credited with causing ice dams, sunlight and warm outside temperatures can also melt the snow. “As an ice dam grows or recedes, snowmelt penetration may move up or down the roof,” Kuhn says. “The resulting freeze-thaw cycle from one part of the roof to another will worsen the water penetration problem. Cracks, flaws or gaps in the roof, shingles, roofing paper or sheathing will grow as the water passing through them freezes and expands.”

In some cases, the bottom surface of the snow, after thawing and freezing repeatedly for days or weeks, may form a solid glaze on the roof surface. This traps a thin layer of water that can extend well up the roof past the top of the actual “dam.” “Pressure from accumulated snow on the roof surface can be strong enough to force the water through even small nail holes or roofing overlap,” he adds. “Since the snow itself acts as an insulator, the melting can occur even when outside temperatures are well below freezing.”

The major factors that influence the formation of ice dams and the damage they can cause include:

- **Insulation and Ventilation.** Too little insulation (attic and/or roof) will allow heat to escape from inside the house and warm the surface of the roof, causing water to run down to the overhang or gutters, where the surface is cooler. Here the water freezes, building the dam. However, no amount of added insulation will be effective unless there is enough attic ventilation. “Many people seal off attic vents in the winter to conserve heat,” explains Kuhn, “but heat that has escaped from the living area is no longer useful and should be vented as quickly as possible.”
- **Skylights and Cathedral Ceilings.** Skylights increase problems in two ways – by melting the snow that falls on them, even in very cold weather, and by sealing off the airflow through the rafter cavities above and below the skylight. “This stagnating air will be warmer than the air in vented rafter cavities and will result in more snow melting,” notes Kuhn. Cathedral ceilings, he explains, are especially difficult to insulate and ventilate, since both must be taken care of

between the limited confines of the roof rafters. “Unfortunately, there is no easy fix for this,” he adds. “For low-level ice problems, recirculating the heat at the ridge, where it gets warmest, can be done with heat-return ducts placed high in the ceiling, or the use of ceiling fans. But both of these methods have drawbacks.”

- **Roof Pitch.** The steeper the roof, the more likely that the snow will slide off and ice dams won’t form. “Steeper roofs are also less likely to leak even with ice dams, since the water won’t back up as far,” Kuhn explains.
- **Roofing Material.** Asphalt, fiberglass and wood-shingle roofs tend to hold the snow the most, whereas with metal and slate roofing, there is less friction, so the snow can slide off more easily. “When ice dams do occur, metal roofing in general is most impervious to leaks,” Kuhn reports. However, he adds that metal roofs are often the most difficult to properly “flash” around openings, which can also cause problems with leakage.

- **Roof Orientation.** North facing roofs are the most prone to ice dams, since they have the least sunlight on them. East orientations are next, followed by west and south.
- **Weather Conditions.** “While there is nothing we can do about weather, it is still the most significant cause of ice dams,” Kuhn says. “Ice dams form when there is a lot of snow. Rain on top of snow can cause the worst problems.” Daily temperature cycling – sunny days followed by cold, below-freezing nights – can be terrible for roofs if there is a lot of snow, since it can quickly build up very thick ice dams.

Kuhn says that while you can’t prevent ice dams in all situations, there are measures homeowners can take to reduce their likelihood. “The first step is to understand how and why ice dams form.” And while the immediate concern is to attempt to remove snow and ice from the roof, this is not always the most practical or safest approach.



“An untrained person chipping and poking at the roof will also undoubtedly be faced with spring-time roof repairs, not to speak of the dangers this put the person in,” Kuhn warns.

Many people are under the impression that eave-area, heating cables will solve the problem of ice dams, Kuhn adds. “With electrical heat cables, however, secondary ice dams often form above the line of cables. Even the installation of two or three feet of metal flashings under the roof material at the eaves will not completely solve the dilemma of ice dams.”

Instead, HouseMaster technical experts offer the following advice to homeowners concerned with ice dams:

- Develop a “cold roof.” Bring attic-area roof surfaces to roughly the same temperature as the exterior surfaces. While this generally requires professional help (particularly in a previously built house), it involves a two-step approach to insulate and ventilate, thereby reducing heated-air contact with the roof surface. This can often be implemented at a minimal cost.

- Consider metal roofing or eave flashings. Such roof materials allow the snow to slide off when there is a relatively steep slope. However, this solution may not work on gently sloping roofs.
- Check gutter placement. Make sure gutters are not set too high, since ice-filled gutters force water back up under the roofing, and can be pulled off or damaged by the ice. Gutter guards, which are actually designed to overlap gutters so that leaves slide off roofs while the rainwater enters the gutter system, can also be helpful by eliminating the usual open gutters. In some cases, it is better not to use gutters, provided that roof run-off is adequately directed away from the foundation area of the house.

While total elimination of ice dams may not be possible, proper design and/or remedial measures may reduce the frequency and amount of damage caused by them.

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