

Holidays are great time for leaders to express appreciation

By Rick Maier

“I appreciate the holiday turkey, boss, but what I’d much rather receive is an occasional pat on the back during the year.”

These words probably reflect the sentiments of far too many employees these days.

Even though most business managers get in a merry mood at this time of year, they fail to express their appreciation on a personal level to people.

Whenever I think about taking relationships for granted, I remember this *Little House on the Prairie* episode - it’s not exactly a holiday story, but it makes a good point about giving thanks and resolving to do better in the new year.

This little old widow lived by herself out in the prairie. Her several children lived far away, fully absorbed in raising their own families. She missed them dearly. With the help of a mischievous friend, she decided to stage her own funeral.

Upon hearing of the death of their mother, her children and their families returned immediately to the old homestead. At the memorial service, each of her kids stood at the coffin and expressed their deepest regrets at not having spent more time with their mother who they all loved dearly. The lovely old lady listened intently from behind the curtain, tears streaming down her cheeks.

When they all finished, she appeared from behind the curtain, scaring them half to death. After fussing at their mother for her deception, they all embraced and expressed how much they loved each other. After hours of laughter and joy, they parted with a determination to get together more regularly.

Most of us fail to adequately express our love and appreciation in a timely fashion - we end up sending flowers to a funeral home instead of the person’s home where they can enjoy them. It’s true in our personal lives as well as at work.

If I think back to the most memorable events in my career, they nearly all revolve around recognition and appreciation. I vividly recall specific times when I had the honor of recognizing people for faithful service or outstanding performance, and I warmly remember the times I received awards or appreciation myself.

But if appreciating others is so wonderful, why don’t we do it more often?

Oh, we have excuses, plenty of excuses – we don't want to single out one person or event, it's too awkward, don't have time, and so on.

Many of us make an extra effort between Thanksgiving and New Years to count our blessings and give thanks. But it fades right after the holidays.

Some of us take advantage of the many occasions during the year when it's natural to show your appreciation - employment anniversaries, birthdays, fiscal year-ends and project completions.

Most of us could be more spontaneous in giving thanks by reacting more swiftly, more often and in front of others.

Start at home by getting on the floor and playing with your dog until you wear him out. Look your kids in the eye and explain to them why you love them. Tell your spouse and parents how much you appreciate them.

Go around your office and thank those people who help you get the job done and make coming to work everyday enjoyable.

Make it personal and be sincere. Don't sugar coat things - saying nice things to people who don't deserve it makes your praise meaningless to everyone.

Don't be too surprised if some people are reluctant when you ask to see them alone, or get emotional when they realize that you're not going to yell at them. So many have gone so long without a kind word that they're conditioned to expect the worst when the boss calls. Expressing your appreciation to people you care about is what it's really all about.

Rick Maier is CFO at Wesleyan College

Reply to rmaier@wesleyancollege.edu