

Four Magic Words

A nurse ushered me into my grandma's room. Lying in the hospital bed, she looked so small. Her eyes were closed. I sat down quietly.

I was on my way to seminary and full of self-doubt. I had just given up a full scholarship to medical school, and everyone thought I was making a mistake. I desperately wanted

Grandma's advice, but the nurse had warned me that she didn't have much strength left. After half an hour, Grandma hadn't stirred, so I just started talking. Suddenly she woke up, asking, "Danny, is that you?"

She told me how her faith had guided her all her life. After a few minutes, a great peace settled around us. I kissed Grandma and turned to leave, but then I heard her whisper some parting words. I leaned over to listen. "I believe in you," she said.

Grandma died that night, but in more than 20 years of work as a Christian psychologist, I have passed on her words many times. Four simple words can make a lifetime of difference.

—Dan Montgomery



I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among the men [in my company] the greatest asset I possess, and the way to develop the best in a man is by appreciation and encouragement.

There is nothing else that so kills the ambitions of a man as criticisms from his superiors. I never criticize anyone. I believe in giving a man incentive to work. So I am anxious to praise, but loathe to find fault. If I like anything, I am hearty in my approbation and lavish in my praise.

—Charles Schwab (American Industrialist, 1862-1939)

The applause of a single human being is of great consequence.

—Samuel Johnson (English writer, 1709-1784)

The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.

—William James (American philosopher, 1842-1920)

The Art of Praise

There is a very basic courtesy that should apply in all human relations—taking the time to thank people who help us. My friend Mike Somdal is a specialist at this. One reason he is so successful in business is that he has mastered the fine art of making people feel good by thanking them regularly. Often he will call customers simply to thank them again for the order they placed last week or for the recommendation they made to another customer, or for the lunch. Anything. And before the conversation is over, Mike has often secured another order. Of course, if he called simply with ulterior motives, his clients would recognize the manipulation and resist. But Mike has made gratitude a lifelong habit, and those of us who do business with him appreciate that quality. And we respond.

The art of praise—what is known as positive reinforcement in the current psychological jargon—is an essential

art for an executive or teacher [or anyone dealing with people] to master. If there is a complaint employees most often express, it is this: "I never get any feedback from the boss—except when something goes wrong." And the teenagers who sit in my office tell me again and again, "My dad gets all over my case when I mess up at school, but when I bring home a good grade he acts as if it's nothing—that I'm finally doing what I should have been doing all along." Stop and think. How long has it been since you took a full 60 seconds to talk to your son or daughter about some fine thing they've just done? Or your secretary, or the managers who work under you?

When someone comes along who genuinely thanks us, we will follow that person a very long way.

—Alan Loy McGinnis