Why Praise Can Backfire – And How to Do It Right

The truth about praise

- Experts tell us that employees are starving for praise and recognition
- Pat them on the back often and they’ll work harder and give you their loyalty
- But praise isn’t as simple as the “experts” sometimes make it seem – and using it randomly or as a shortcut to real engagement can backfire

Two levels of communication

- Experienced managers know that communication occurs on multiple levels
- First, you have the literal words you speak – the “text” of your message
- Second, you have the “subtext,” which is often what leaves the biggest impact on those you’re speaking to
- When the “text” and “subtext” of your praise are misaligned, you lose credibility because workers sense that you’re manipulating them

The secret to getting praise right

- Carefully think through WHY you want to deliver praise – what exactly did the employee do that warrants recognition?
- Be specific – cite examples of the behavior that pleased you and explain the impact it had on your team or organization
- Show that you “get” the person deserving of praise – what contribution did they make that was unique to their skill set, attitude or personality?
- FINAL NOTE: Praise isn’t about quantity – it’s about purposeful, specific feedback to drive positive behaviors

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