Actively Attending to Appreciation in the Workplace:

Design, Implementation and Evaluation of a Pilot Program

Abstract

This project was based on my research as a scholar-practitioner experimenting with different ways of using appreciation in the workplace to create a more positive, engaging environment. My workplace had become disengaging so I set out to find a way to use appreciation to create an enjoyable workspace where employees felt valued for their work. I developed an action-research study to put my ideas of appreciation into practice. This study included two pilot programs called the "Appreciation Board" and "15-Minute Meetings". For this project and paper I evaluated these pilot programs and from that evaluation created a method called "Appreciation Space". This method addresses how to actively attend to appreciation through four supporting factors that energize the Appreciation Space. This space is not a physical space but a whole-person space that allows employees' to experience appreciation by recognizing the contributions they make through mind, body, and spirit. Leaders energize the Appreciation Space by being aware and incorporating into their management practices clear standards, organizational culture, and vision to create engaged employees.

Keywords: appreciation, workplace, positive environment, Appreciation Space

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This project was developed based on my experiences in a disengaging workplace where employees did not feel valued for their contributions to the organization. My job title was store manager and I was leader of a 35 person retail sales team. As leader I wanted to create a more positive environment where employees knew they were appreciated. I thought by using appreciation as a team, we could make improvements, to better our store. Wanting to do a better job as leader, of showing employees their work was valued I created a group-influenced, leader-led action research study. This study focused on my main pilot program called the Appreciation Board which then expanded with a second pilot program called 15-Minute Meetings.

As my AIP project developed, especially my OD Network paper and as I delved into the evaluation of my pilot programs, I wanted to explore how to put my ideas into action. In reviewing the literature I could not find an exact solution for appreciation to be applied in the workplace to create a more positive, engaging, and supportive environment. So based on my evaluation, I decided to create the Appreciation Space method; a way for leaders, in any industry, to actively attend to appreciation and make the overall employee experience better leading to more engaged employees. So this paper will focus on defining appreciation in the workplace, encouraging employee engagement, an evaluation of my pilot programs, and the development of my Appreciation Space method.

Encouraging Employee Engagement through Appreciation

My pilot programs began because personally I had been struggling to keep myself engaged in my workplace, I felt dehumanized - just another cog in the wheel, getting the job done. I thought if I felt this way most likely my employees did too which I confirmed through

conversations with them. Ramsey (2010) stresses the idea that "a depersonalized workplace is a soulless workplace…It's up to leaders to humanize the workplace" (p. 12).   So my goal, as leader became how to humanize my workplace; make my store a more appreciative place, where employees were genuinely respected for their day-to-day work.

Defining Appreciation in the Workplace

The concept to humanize my workplace was rooted in the organizational development humanistic perspective, described by Brun & Dugas (2008) as, "concerned with recognizing people, their being, their unique, distinctive character and their existence" (p. 720). Furthermore, the scholarly literature reminded me that there is an ethical perspective of respecting employees' humanity and that they are not just a mere means to make a profit; this picks up on Karl Marx's philosophy of ethical treatment of employees. In *Great Traditions in Ethics* (Denise, White & Peterfreund, 2008) the authors share Karl Marx's ideas, stating "In capitalist societies, human beings become mere objects when the product of their labor is no longer theirs and when their activities are controlled by others" (p. 191).

Building on this, I decided there needed to be a definition of "appreciation in the workplace" for this project. This definition became: employee work is given proper value by recognizing contributions made to the organization through productivity coming from humanity, spirit and authentic-self. In my research, my practical way of applying this definition, was through the Appreciation Board where my whole team gave meaningful feedback to each other. This helped my team feel more supported and validated in our environment. The definition of appreciation in the workplace used, Barge & Oliver's (2003) appreciative spirit as a platform, according to the authors, "Appreciative spirit is creating conversation around life-giving forces within organizations and by developing a consensus around these positive themes" (p. 126).

Within my store, I wanted to use appreciation because I felt it could be our life-giving force, and it could be rallied around to encourage positive behavior.

Leaders need to take part in this behavior too. Conant & Norgaard (2011), organizational change practitioners, encourage leaders to use the whole-person, humanized perspective with "TouchPoint Leadership". TouchPoint Leadership is a way that leaders interact with people regularly, both intentional and spur-of-the moment interactions, how they "touch" someone to give inspiration, direction, and guidance, shape the status quo or create an urgency to get the job done. It requires a leader to understand how to use their head, heart and hands to show appreciation within TouchPoint moments. The authors' state, "Your touch is where the three strands (head, heart, and hands) come together in the art of the moment, enabling you to make clear judgments in the TouchPoint" (p.31). When leaders put the definition of appreciation in the workplace into practice, it shows they respect employees and creates a more personalized place where they feel appreciated and supported by leadership.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is more than employee satisfaction - it recognizes a person's true contribution. Mastrangelo (2009) describes employee engagement as "found in employees' minds, hearts and hands. We expect engaged employees to decide to continue working for their employer, to feel pride and motivation working for their employer, and to be willing to exert extra energy at work for their employer" (p.14). Through observations and conversations during my study, I realized employees felt more valued and became more engaged in the workplace when we actively used appreciation. What resulted from the engagement was thoughtful customer service, increased productivity, improved sales metrics, and creative problem-solving.

Employees want to be engaged and contribute to their organization; engagement can be a simple, low-cost solution to help an organization boost confidence amongst employees (Perschel, 2010). Maylett & Nielsen (2012) explain in the article *There is No Cookie-Cutter Approach to Engagement* that employee engagement is "defined as a voluntary dedication and commitment to doing the very best work" (p.59). This article goes on to explain there is no exact method to employee engagement but there is an urgent need to nurture it because there are ties between engaged employees and quality customer service, profitability, and productivity.

This was evident in my experience, as the more I involved employees with appreciation they eagerly engaged in the organization and were willing to contribute. One example of increased engagement, I saw during our active use of appreciation, was when two employees came up with the creative idea called "Disco Tuesday". Every Tuesday anyone on the sales floor, including customers, danced around to the disco music station. Tuesdays became a day for fun and laughs; employees were highly involved in customer conversations and this resulted in adding-on items to the sale or encouraging customers who were "just looking" to make purchases. As employees felt more appreciated and supported; they became more engaged in the environment and felt confident to try out new, imaginative ideas. Appreciation is deeper than issuing a yearly bonus – it is creating engaged employees to energize the workplace.

Background of the Pilot Programs

The timeframe of this study was over a 15 month period. The Appreciation Board was the first program, and took place over nine months, but was reintroduced twice during this time based on suggestions and changes made to fit new environments. The 15-Minute Meeting program was introduced in the last five months of the study. The cycle of redeveloping and

reintroducing both these programs based on suggestions for change made this study action research.

The Appreciation Board

The Appreciation Board was a bulletin board that displayed hand-written notes of appreciation for all to see. Each employee's name was featured on a handmade card specially designed by a creative employee. I then purchased sticky notes, cards with key chains, and oversized shout-out notes for all employees to use. As the leader I then discussed with the front-line supervisors how I wanted to show appreciation more openly through considerate behavior and by using the Appreciation Board. The supervisors then coached the staff on using appreciation, for at least two weeks in daily "spot talks", short meetings designed to communicate tasks and coach on performance.

15-Minute Meetings

The other pilot program, 15-Minute Meetings used in the latter half of my study was designed, to discuss with employees their level of engagement in our workplace. In this pilot program, I used a self-designed employee engagement survey to collect information, on different aspects of how involved employees were on the job. In this program I designed two separate worksheets to collect information from my employees on their engagement levels. Overall, I wanted to get an overview of how engaged they felt in our environment. In the past, I had conducted similar meetings as a way to engage employees, in conversation on bettering our working environment. I continued with this method for the part-time staff; see Appendix A for this worksheet.

I decided to create a more refined worksheet for full-time and long-term employees, to better collect information on employee engagement levels; see Appendix B for this worksheet.

This worksheet was based on 11 factors that influence employee engagement from Scott Blanchard's (2011) work on creating a more engaging work environment for high potential employees. These 11 factors are: meaningful work, collaboration, justice, autonomy, feedback/recognition, growth, workload balance, performance expectations, task variety, connectedness with leader, and connectedness with colleagues. See Appendix B for the definitions of the 11 factors; 14 employees took part in the engagement survey during the 15-Minute Meeting pilot program. Please review Appendix C and D to see examples of how employees filled out both types of worksheets.

Evaluation of the Pilot Programs

When I initiated the Appreciation Board I decided to engage the whole staff in appreciation and investigate the positives which built on Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry method. Cooperrider & Avital (2005), in describing the method of Appreciative Inquiry, state "Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them"; they go on to discuss that it is discovering what gives a system life when it is at its best (p. 11). In evaluation, I realized I was using Appreciative Inquiry; I wanted to know the best of my staff and our system. My staff was already good at using appreciation and this positive behavior could be built on to influence change for a more appreciative environment.

Results of the Appreciation Board

The Appreciation Board was a success and positive results were seen within the first week as the staff demonstrated more energized, enthusiastic, and respectful behavior. Within the first month I saw frequent use of appreciation resulting in a more supportive, happy, and motivated team that was having fun. Employees interacted with customers in a playful and

informative manner suggesting products that resulted in increased sales. The notes of

appreciation on the Appreciation Board expressed little acts like helping with a stock list to big

acts like preventing a negative customer experience. I observed that these notes of appreciation

reflected our store values, such as respecting co-workers and creating an exceptional customer

service experience.

In using the board, I thought the staff would feel most appreciated by the leadership team,

but it turned out the most meaningful notes of appreciation were peer-to-peer notes. Showing

appreciation helped keep employees engaged by recognizing what they contributed with their

head, heart, and hands to the workplace. This can be seen in Table 1 in notes of appreciation

from the Appreciation Board.

Table 1

Appreciation Board Comments

- "AWESOME job with Australian dude! Good job getting him what he needed and making a great experience :) Amy"

- "S - Thanks for taking care of sick kids mess!!"

- "(Associate to associate) Thanks for periodically checking in on me while I was greeting to see if I needed anything. It was super considerate of you!"

- "W - Thanks for stepping up and helping get A going on her 1st day! Really helped out a lot. Thanks! :)"

- "D, thanks for clocking in early to do stock. Thanks for the extra effort. Love-J"

- L – Thank you so much for all your help with the floor set. All your hard work paid off. Out displays look great all because of you! Thank you, K"

These comments were very impactful to keeping the team energized and the environment

positive. Through the Appreciation Board the team was more imaginative and it fed our

appreciative spirit. Employees were eager to contribute their work to the organization.

Outside the store the Appreciation Board also had a contribution for my peers, other managers in my district, by encouraging them to use appreciation to recognize their employees. I was encouraged by my direct supervisor, based on the success of the Appreciation Board, to give a presentation on ways to foster more employee appreciation. This turned into a community of practice, where managers in the district came together on conference calls and through a Wiki, to share ideas on employee appreciation and best practices. Lave & Wenger (1991) in their book *Situated Learning* discuss learning in a social context stating "In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world" (p.49). Overall, it was exciting to witness a relational learning space develop, as a way for all managers to solve problems, share knowledge and ideas. Plus it was exciting to watch the goal of increased employee appreciation being spread across the district.

As time progressed, the holidays quickly approached and unfortunately in a retail environment this presented a challenge to keep appreciation going strong. We kept at it using the Appreciation Board, although in the beginning of the year we faced surmounting challenges that our store may close, move, or be re-modeled. The fear of the unknown made us feel, the most unappreciated we had ever felt, and no one felt much like participating in the Appreciation Board. Eventually, we found out we were moving and had three weeks to setup shop in a temporary location. The Appreciation Board came down and went into storage while at the temporary store. We tried to keep the momentum going, by providing a space for appreciation notes but it was difficult in a temporary space, plus no one felt much like participating in appreciation because we feared what was next - the uncertainty of change harmed our appreciative spirit.

Being a scholarly-practioner I saw the success of using appreciation and wanted to keep it going, but the stresses of opening a new store and feeling unappreciated myself took their toll. Once the new store opened and we faced a new set of challenges. Morale, appreciation, respect, and emotional well-being were at an all time low due to exhaustion and difficulties resulting from the move. I reintroduced the Appreciation Board, as a less permanent structure but it did not have the same success as in the past. No one person could manage the board and this resulted in the board becoming cluttered. Additionally, during this round of the Appreciation Board it was not explained well to newer employees and they never truly understood its purpose.

Overall the lesson to be learned with the Appreciation Board, was that it did add to a more positive and engaging environment. There were challenges including: the need for a faithful and dependable caretaker, a permanent place and structure for the board, employees needed to clearly understand the purpose, training was needed on appreciation and how to use the board, and lastly uncontrollable emotional factors impacted how employees felt on using appreciation in the workplace.

Results of 15-Minute Meetings Program

The results of the 15-Minute Meeting program showed employees were engaged in their daily tasks but as a leader there was opportunity for me to create a more engaging environment. The results of the engagement survey (Appendix B) are stated here in Table 2. In total there were 14 participants and the rankings in the survey were 1 being the lowest and 7 the highest.

Table 2

Results of 15-Minute Meetings Engagement Survey

Engagement Factor	Median	Average	Mode
Meaningful Work	5	5.43	5.00
Collaboration	6	5.50	6.00
Justice	5	4.62*	5.00

Engagement Factor	Median	Average	Mode
Autonomy	6	5.79	6.00
Feedback/Recognition	5	5.36	5.00
Growth	6	5.64	6.00
Workload Balance	6	5.64	7.00
Performance Expectations	6	5.71	6.00
Task Variety	5	5.21	5.00
Connectedness with Leader	6	5.93	7.00
Connectedness with Colleagues	6	5.93	6.00

* one participant did not answer this question resulting in a lower average.

In evaluating the results of 15-Minute Meetings the greatest challenge I noticed was task variety. In the retail environment it is a challenge because day-to-day tasks do not differ much. After these meetings based on employee suggestions, we did put into place a greeter at the front door to encourage interactive activities with customers as they walked in the door. This both helped employees as well as the customers be continually engaged. I also tried to make sure all the associates became more familiar with the stockrooms and were more cross-functional overall. Another associate was interested in keeping up the continuous improvement suggestion board so he took that lead; kept ideas organized and put simple ones into action.

Another area where I saw a challenge was with the meaningful work factor, as employees did not feel their work was valued nor understood how it contributed to the organization as a whole. There was a problem; the corporate leaders wanted employees to provide a high level of customer service every time. Employees were frustrated because they felt they did provide this high level of service and made the sales goals but in exchange the company did not provide them with a high level of service. This included things such as not communicating with us concerning our store move, inadequate pay and little benefits for part-time employees. It was difficult for employees to be fully engaged in providing excellent customer service because they felt the company's only goal was to make a profit. There was also frustration with the compulsory sales

script; employees felt it took away from personalized service and the ability to be themselves in the workplace. They felt trapped in using the script and after conducting 15-Minute Meetings, I decided as manager they could "sneak" the required question into customer conversations but the focus would be on genuine conversation. This paired with a new style of sales floor leadership developed in-store, where we coached associates hourly, helped employees become more involved again in the environment.

The last factor that I noticed presented a challenge was the justice factor. Most of the employees felt that the level of compensation to the level of work and expectations was not adequate. I agreed with this but it was a difficult change to make. I brought it forward to my direct supervisor as an issue that needed to be addressed. Most of the problem was getting corporate leaders to understand, in a large urban city like Chicago wages needed to be higher to provide a living wage. This was an on-going issue during my time at the Downtown Chicago store and when I had started at this store I worked diligently to get wages raised. I was allowed to raise wages based on performance but it was extremely difficult work, which required me to fight for the cause through multiple levels of management. This time I decided to leave it with my direct supervisor in hopes she could make a difference.

In addition to conducting 15-Minute Meetings in September, we developed and put into place a new style of floor leadership, at the end of August. This new style of sales floor leadership, consisted of having a "opening moment" at the start of each associates shift, where the floor leader would engage them in a improv game or breathing exercise. We also held spot talks once every hour (or once every 3 hours during high traffic days) to improve performance and give frequent feedback. In my 15-Minute Meeting interviews, people were excited about this new way of leadership - employees felt they would get more feedback and the workplace

would be more interactive. Using this new style of sales floor leadership became extremely important, as I realized that feedback/recognition was comparatively ranked lower than other factors in the engagement survey.

There were also numerous positives that resulted from the engagement survey. These were: connectedness with leader, connectedness with colleagues, collaboration, autonomy and performance expectations. The one that surprised me the most was performance expectations. Almost all employees felt that the expectations were clear and the management team within the store set expectations fairly. Lastly, the factor that ranked high, that was not a surprise to me was connectedness. All employees felt connected to colleagues and the leader; this was the "central heart" of our team. I knew as a team we could draw on connectedness to reach positive change and overall help us meet our goals.

Overall, the results of the 15-Minute Meeting pilot program indicated engagement levels were fairly high and employees were engaged in the store environment but they did not feel engaged by the company. Employees did not understand how their work contributed to the organization as a whole. The evaluation of my pilot programs helped influence my Appreciation Space Method as a way for leaders to understand how to actively use appreciation with their workforce.

Developing the Appreciation Space Method

Appreciation in my workplace was beneficial, but to be truly effective with it, I knew leaders would need to do more than simply post up an Appreciation Board. When developing the Appreciation Space method, I decided that it would be a prescriptive method, because the intention is to teach leaders how to actively use appreciation in an organization. The idea of Appreciation Space builds on Meyer's (2010) descriptive method of "Playspace". The goal of

space in Playspace is that it is not a physical space but rather a mind-set where people feel confident to play, innovate, learn, and collaborate. Appreciation Space is similar because it is not a physical space but an emotional space that encourages employees to be engaged yet it differs in that it is a prescriptive method for leaders.

In the Appreciation Space Method, the definition of appreciation in the workplace and encouraging employee engagement are put into practice. Employees experience appreciation through four supporting factors which are standards, culture, awareness and vision. The Appreciation Space is an emotional, whole-person space that is energized when employees experience appreciation through the supporting factors. This method is more than just saying thank you - it is a deep commitment from leadership to incorporate gratitude into their regular management practices to energize the space. When the space is energized, employees are more likely to be engaged in their work, and they want to go the extra mile for the organization.

Four Supporting Factors of Appreciation

In developing the Appreciation Space method, I realized through my own experiences and in reading the literature, employees wanted to experience appreciation in all aspects of their work life. This is why I created the four supporting factors, sticking with my goal to humanize the workplace, so that leaders can understand how to appreciate employees and help them to know their work has meaning.

Standards.

Standards are clearly stated and understood organizational values, goals, and expectations. Standards in Appreciation Space build on Kouzes & Posner's (2003) idea of giving employees principles to live by and use in their daily work. They define standards as a shared set of goals and values or principles. Clearly stating values and goals as a base to work from also identifies with adult learning theory. Adult learners are self-directed in their learning

and benefit from clearly set criterion so they can use them as a foundation to conduct their daily work (MacKeracher, 2010). When standards are clear employees have a baseline from which to make wise decisions, collaborate with co-workers and customers, and be engaged in learning.

Understanding values allows employees to build a strong foundation from which to base all their work. Employees are more driven, especially in customer service, when they understand that appreciation and recognition is reflected in the organization's goals and values (Bielaszka-DuVernay, 2007). Zappos, an online retailer, is a leader in using core values to guide business goals and employee expectations. Tony Hsieh (2010), the CEO of Zappos, throughout his book *Delivering Happiness* shares practical examples from employees on how they use ten core values in daily leadership and customer interactions. Hsieh states that many organizations have core values but do not commit to them, but at Zappos he states "by commit, we mean that you're willing to hire and fire based on them" (p.154).   These values are non-negotiable and they are lived by every day. Employees at Zappos know how to confidently make decisions, interact with customers, set their limits, and collaborate every day based on these ten core values.

Culture.

Workplace culture within the Appreciation Space method means connectedness to leaders and co-workers, a collaborative environment full of inquiry, fun, and personalized recognition. Recognition is important in actively using appreciation but it is only a component. There is a challenge in making the distinction between recognition and appreciation. In the practitioner literature the words are often used interchangeably but there is a difference. Appreciation is shown in all actions whereas recognition is used to point out special achievements. Recognition needs to be genuine and personalized for it to be considered authentic.

While recognition is the dominating factor in culture, connectedness to leaders and co-workers, collaboration, inquiry and a fun/playful environment are equally as important to show appreciation. Connectedness with leaders, co-workers and expanding an internal network optimizes collaboration and inquiry. Harper (2010) encourages organizations to support employees in creating an internal network because friendship in the workplace can increase job satisfaction and strengthen collaboration. Meyer (2010), in her book *From Workspace to Playspace*, states that incorporating play into a culture allows for employees to be able to respond quickly, be flexible and adapt to organizational change. Play is not just a way to interject some fun but a way to make employees more adaptable to change and creative in problem-solving.

Awareness.

Leadership awareness sets the example for all employees' use of appreciation in the workplace yet is most important for leaders. Awareness includes being mindful, setting an example, being on the ground with employees, and respecting the role that emotions have in the organizational environment. Emotions are frequently ignored or expected to be pushed away on the job but they contribute significantly to employees' performance and learning. Leaders need to be emotionally intelligent and recognize how emotions affect meaning-making in adult learning (Dirkx, 2001). When employees feel positive emotions in seeing their leader using appreciation it will result in a positive emotional reaction and employees will want to follow the leader's example.

An aware leader is mindful of interacting with employees on a regular basis and makes sure to put the organizational values into action when connecting with employees. When leaders are mindful of their own behavior employees will follow their example, as Kouzes & Posner

(2003), state "nothing communicates more clearly than what the leaders *do*" (p. 135). When leaders are on the ground with employees it offers the opportunity for employees to see for themselves the leader in action and setting the example of showing appreciation. The leader then shows that they value the Appreciation Space method and know the expectations of using appreciation themselves.

In evaluating my pilot programs I learned how impactful leadership awareness can be, as the lack of it affected my employees' workplace engagement. When conducting interviews for 15-Minute Meetings, a particular example repeatedly came forward about the lack of awareness from the corporate leadership team. It was a specific incident that happened on the night of our new store move. Employees noticed two members of the leadership team, who came to help for one evening, were taking an extended break chatting outside the store. Employees felt extremely discouraged that these key members of the leadership team were not setting the example of hard work. The staff felt that if their leaders were not being accountable for getting the job done why should they work hard serving customers?

As a result of this incident, as confirmed through conversations with employees, they were frustrated. Due to experiencing this incident, some employees felt they did not need to work hard, after experiencing this example set by their leaders. The results were they cared less about the job; customer service levels dropped, they let emotions control them in co-worker interactions and were confrontational with me as their direct manager. Zigarmi, Blanchard, Essary & Houson (2010) in the white paper *The Leadership-Profit Chain* stress "The way that leaders treat employees is the way that employees will treat the customer" (p. 5). Awareness in the Appreciation Space method is crucial because it not only shows employees are appreciated but also sets the example how they should behave.

Vision.

To reach the goal, of making a more humanized space, leaders need to plan for employee growth, learning and offer opportunities to celebrate together. It takes vision on behalf of leaders to continually energize the Appreciation Space by regularly attending to appreciation and creating this whole-person, emotional space for employees. New leaders need to be developed on the value of the Appreciation Space method if there is to be continued success.

Employee growth takes vision by challenging both leaders and employees to continually seek new learning opportunities. In evaluating interviews from the 15-Minute Meetings, I noticed growth opportunities for full-time employees were vital, but more importantly were continued learning opportunities for all employees. Many part-time staff members were interested in learning new things to create more task variety for themselves. The overall message on growth was that employees wanted to keep learning in their role to fend off boredom, discover new skills, and be more versatile within the team environment. Giving employees opportunity for growth and learning shows foresight and challenges employees to have vision of their own.

Vision in the Appreciation Space method also includes creating events where everyone can celebrate success together. Leadership needs to look to the future to plan and achieve long-term organizational goals. Kouzes & Posner (2003) stress the importance of celebrating together because it is a time when all employees can come together to cheer each other on for reaching a shared goal. As a result networks are strengthened, the culture enriched, and opportunities are created for connectedness among employees and leaders (Chapman & White, 2011).

Participating in my action research study and evaluating my pilot programs ignited a passion in me to start the discussion on improving workplaces through appreciation. The

Appreciation Space method helps leaders by giving them direction on actively attending to appreciation through the four contributing factors. This then energizes the Appreciation Space resulting in employees who want to contribute to the organization via minds, hearts, and hands. Energizing this space creates a more positive, engaged workplace where employees feel their hard work means something. Hopefully this is a continued cycle where: leaders use appreciation, employees are energized in the Appreciation Space, and all employees experience employee engagement. This positive cycle creates engaged employees at all levels, they know how to define appreciation, and have a desire to keep the momentum the Appreciation Space moving forward.

Further Study

There are many opportunities for further study connected to using appreciation in the workplace and applying the Appreciation Space method. The most prominent that I would like to investigate is a "phase two" of this project: designing a learning program for organizational leaders on how to use the Appreciation Space method. Additionally, through further research I would like to understand more the connection between appreciation and higher employee engagement levels. In evaluating my pilot programs the results did show employee engagement levels were positively influenced by using appreciation; moreover productivity increased, emotional burnout was decreased, and customer service was improved. Overall I would like to better understand all of these elements: actively attending to appreciation through the Appreciation Space, how it effects employee engagement and how leaders can be successful in leading through appreciation.

Conclusion

Appreciation in the workplace is not just a concept to me as a scholar-practioner - it is a passion. Through this project I hope conversation will spark on how to actively attend to appreciation in the workplace. In addition, how appreciation can be used to create a more positive workplace environment where employees can feel valued and engaged by their leaders. Leaders need to recognize the definition of appreciation and how it respects workers humanity and values employees' contributions to the organization. Any organizational leader can meet the goal of creating a more positive, engaged workplace by setting standards, cultivating a culture, acting in awareness, and inspiring vision.

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Appendix A

15 Minute Meeting   **NAME:**   **Date:**

The idea of these "15 minute meetings" is so that managers can touch base with everyone every 4-6 weeks.

 I. Touch Base
- **What is going on with you and the store? How do you feel things are going…day-to-day, weekly, etc? Questions/Comments.**

II. Praise/Plus Points
- **List _2_ things that you LIKE that are happening in the store, our Chicago store team, etc…**

 1.

 2.

III. YOUR Goals/Things for YOU to Work On until next meeting
- **List _2_ goals you want to work on within the next 4-6 weeks until our next meeting…**
- **How are you going to make sure they happen and how can the leadership team help you?**

 1.

 2.

IV. Miscellaneous/Comments/Questions/Concerns…

Appendix B

*Directions: T*his is a 15 Minute Meeting Agenda. You fill it out and you'll walk through it with a manager. The idea of this is to check in with each other, look for goals and development of you as an employee, discuss performance improvement opportunities, and for regular feedback. This meeting agenda is split into sections that contribute to you being an engaged employee and what us managers can do to help that along.

Please fill out this form with just use the scale and the write ***ONE sentence*** per topic before your scheduled meeting time. The more effort you put in here the better conversation we can have which will then help everyone grow, develop and improve together.

1.   **Meaningful Work** (Understanding of how you contribute to store/company as a whole, how your work adds value, focus on a purpose other than making money, shared goals…explain to me how you feel in connection to meaningful work and what we can do together)
      (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

2.   **Collaboration** (A culture that encourages sharing/interdependence/team spirit, environment where coworkers and leaders express appreciation for each other/support each other on tasks, environment that supports and encourages positive and cooperative relationships with others. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
      (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

3.   **Justice** (Resources and benefits are distributed fairly, people compensated fairly based on performance/industry standards, decisions/policies consistently applied, multiple points of view are considered before decisions made, people more concerned about fairness of process than with favorableness of outcome. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
      (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

4.   **Autonomy** (Ability to choose how tasks are performed, having information and authority to make decisions about one's work, being trusted to do one's job without interference, knowing boundaries and limits in regard to decision-making authority. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
      (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5.   **Feedback/Recognition** (Access to accurate information from various sources on job performance, managers/leaders provide specific, appropriate and timely feedback that allows you to make improvements. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
      (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

6.   **Growth** (A manager who assists with career planning, ability to learn from coworkers opportunities to grow/improve current job, opportunities to discuss future development needs/interests with manager. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)

(1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Appendix B

7.   **Workload Balance** (Perceived workload v. time allotted to accomplish tasks is reasonable, timeliness, assistance when needed, resources available, complexity of task, action needed and outcome, workload appropriate to job description, have enough time most days to complete daily tasks. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
       (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

8.   **Performance Expectations** (Understand quantity/quality of work expected from external sources including customer, supervisor, colleagues. Work done to agreed-upon standards, clearly defined levels of performance expected, clarity on how work performance is measured. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the Store)
       (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

9.   **Task Variety** (Job changes enough to stay challenging, boredom v. diversity in tasks, ability to make decisions, not too many rules/routines to create monotony. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life and how it can be mixed up at the Store)
       (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

10.   **Connectedness with Leader** (Environment where trust the leader, leader makes effort to form interpersonal connection, make effort to build rapport, take personal/professional interest, act with integrity. How do you feel connected and what can be done better/changed? What do you expect from leader(s)?)
       (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

11.   **Connected with Colleagues** (Trust of coworkers, interpersonal connection, share information, take personal/professional interest in each other, behave with trust and integrity. do you feel connected and what can be done better/changed?)
       (1-nothing is happening, 10 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Goals for Next Time:

Associate   Manager

Appendix C

15 Minute Meeting

NAME: ▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓

Date:

The idea of these "15 minute meetings" is so that managers can touch base with everyone every 4-6 weeks.

I. Touch Base
- What is going on with you and LEGO? How do you feel things are going...day-to-day, weekly, etc? Questions/Comments.

Week day closing prior to MON/WED/FRI PT and rucking is no fun. I like the staff. I continue to love the product and look for better ways to move it.

II. Praise/Plus Points
- List <u>2</u> things that you LIKE that are happening in the store, about LEGO, our LEGO Chicago team, etc...

1. We have fun at work

2. Closing time is shrinking

III. YOUR Goals/Things for YOU to Work On until next meeting
- List <u>2</u> goals you want to work on within the next 4-6 weeks until our next meeting...
- How are you going to make sure they happen and how can the leadership team help you?

1. Increase closing speeds: up morale buy a second mop? set a final close time, non-buyers should leave ASAP
2. Increase "floaters" moral: rotate cashiers and floators, encourage intermittent stocking from back great shifts every ½ hour
   continous rotation restock

IV. Miscellaneous/Comments/Questions/Concerns...

Loose brick up by greeters, greeters build a simple design for children to mimic and display. Could increase children's "fun-time-ness" and possibly rid our store of hoarders at the Master Builder Bar.

Appendix D

15 Minute Meeting Agenda

Name: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ **Date:** 9/25

Directions: This is a 15 Minute Meeting Agenda. You fill it out and you'll walk through it with a manager. The idea of this is to check in with each other, look for goals and development of you as an employee, discuss performance improvement opportunities, and for regular feedback. This meeting agenda is split into sections that contribute to you being an engaged employee and what us managers can do to help that along.

Please fill out this form with just use the scale and the write **ONE sentence** per topic before your scheduled meeting time. The more effort you put in here the better conversation we can have which will then help everyone grow, develop and improve together.

1. **Meaningful Work** (Understanding of how you contribute to store/company as a whole, how your work adds value, focus on a purpose other than making money, shared goals...explain to me how you feel in connection to meaningful work and what we can do together)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   ⑤   6   7
   I feel Lego wants to make them more $ and that the goal is not to provide a great experience

2. **Collaboration** (A culture that encourages sharing/interdependence/team spirit, environment where coworkers and leaders express appreciation for each other/support each other on tasks, environment that supports and encourages positive and cooperative relationships with others. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   ⑥   7
   I feel like sometimes my ideas arent heard.

3. **Justice** (Resources and benefits are distributed fairly, people compensated fairly based on performance/industry standards, decisions/policies consistently applied, multiple points of view are considered before decisions made, people more concerned about fairness of process than with favorableness of outcome. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   ④   5   6   7
   I don't think we get paid enough.   High expectations should = higher pay

4. **Autonomy** (Ability to choose how tasks are performed, having information and authority to make decisions about one's work, being trusted to do one's job without interference, knowing boundaries and limits in regard to decision-making authority. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   ⑤   6   7
   ~~▓▓▓▓~~

5. **Feedback/Recognition** (Access to accurate information from various sources on job performance, managers/leaders provide specific, appropriate and timely feedback that allows you to make improvements. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   ⑤   6   7

6. **Growth** (A manager who assists with career planning, ability to learn from coworkers opportunities to grow/improve current job, opportunities to discuss future development needs/interests with manager. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)
   (1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5   ⑥   7
   I don't feel like I can learn much more than I already have

7. Workload Balance (Perceived workload ✗ time allotted to accomplish tasks is reasonable, timeliness, assistance when needed, resources available, complexity of task, action needed and outcome, workload appropriate to job description, have enough time most days to complete daily tasks. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)

(1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5 (6) 7

Stock sometimes crazy → smart warehousing I am sure will improve

8. Performance Expectations (Understand quantity/quality of work expected from external sources including customer, supervisor, colleagues. Work done to agreed-upon standards, clearly defined levels of performance expected, clarity on how work performance is measured. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life at the LEGO Store)

(1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5 (6) 7

Things change a lot.

9. Task Variety (Job changes enough to stay challenging, boredom v. diversity in tasks, ability to make decisions, not too many rules/routines to create monotony. Explain to me your view on this towards day-to-day life and how it can be mixed up at the LEGO Store)

(1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4 (5) 6   7

Floor = Boring   Big open space w/ no where to go.

10. Connectedness with Leader (Environment where trust the leader, leader makes effort to form interpersonal connection, make effort to build rapport, take personal/professional interest, act with integrity. How do you feel connected and what can be done better/changed? What do you expect from leader(s)?)

(1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4   5 (6) 7

Dont see you on floor as much. I feel store is losing conectedness w/ manager

11. Connected with Colleagues (Trust of coworkers, interpersonal connection, share information, take personal/professional interest in each other, behave with trust and integrity. do you feel connected and what can be done better/changed?)

(1-nothing is happening, 7 everything perfect)   1   2   3   4 (5) 6   7

I get along w/ most every one.

Goals for Next Time:

Associate

Manager

✳ positive Attid. ————————→ pact

✳ talking to cust ————————→ •give time