

Give specific compliments

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I once asked a boss for some feedback in what was turning out to be the world's shortest performance review. His response? "You're good with people."

Seriously? I've been working my tail off in this job for 2 years and this is the best thing you could come up with? I'm good with people?!

I was not feeling "good with people" that day. In fact, I was feeling outraged. Why?

Such a generic compliment showed me he wasn't really paying attention. It gave me no information about what he wanted to see more of - or less of - from me. And it didn't help me determine what was most important about the job I was doing. I was desperately seeking feedback. This was not helping.

Specific compliments help people know you are paying attention and know what behaviors are most important to you. In the workplace, in the classroom, and in the home, you might want to keep in mind what I learned on the Radical Candor podcast: The purpose of praise isn't to make someone feel good. The purpose of praise is to help people know what to do more of.

So be specific. What message is more valuable? "Thanks for everything," or "Thank you for the way you so carefully handled the Jones account. It was a really difficult renewal, and you communicated clearly with all involved every step of the way. I appreciate your diligence in making sure our client's needs were met in such a professional manner." What message clarifies the impact the employee is having? What message encourages the employee to keep doing good work?

This works at home too. A thank you note I recently wrote to my husband included the line, "I am grateful for your encouraging words, brainstorming, and logistical support, and the freedom you give me to do what I'm so passionate about." I wanted to be clear about exactly what support from him is most helpful as I work on building my speaking career, so I wrote that sentence very carefully.

And as I talk to my kids, I try to be clear on the impact of their actions when they do what I've been asking them to do. "Thank you for cleaning up the bathroom counter. It shows me you care about the other people in your family and it helps us all enjoy a clean space."

Specific compliments enhance your relationships - and give you the opportunity to get more of the behavior you're looking for. Try giving some today!

Some of the content in this post was taken from an article I wrote several years ago for an insurance magazine. Check out [A Little Appreciation Goes a Long Way](#).