

# Bob Ferguson

**"Celebrate small successes with small rewards on a regular basis. This way we reinforce that success is important to us, that we value our teams' efforts, and we make them feel good"**

**KEEPING STAFF** motivated is one of the key challenges for all managers and business owners. There are lots of theories on motivation, but there is one action that stands out from the rest – praise. And what could be simpler than using praise to motivate your staff?

However, it's not as straightforward as it appears. In 2005 Vodafone published its Working Nation survey. It focused on motivation and happiness in the workplace. One of the questions asked managers how many of them used praise to motivate their staff; 84 per cent said they did.

When they asked the staff who worked for those managers how many of them received praise as motivation, the answer was only 32 per cent. In other words, more than half the managers who thought they were giving praise weren't getting that message through to their staff. This is a problem because praise is essential for motivation.

In his book *Flow*, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi demonstrates that a key factor in motivating people when they have been successful is immediate feedback.

So, the next time someone does a good job for you, try this; write brief thanks and appreciation on a sticky note, put it right in the middle of their desk and watch what happens when the person sees it. They will likely smile, their back will

straighten and you'll get a sense of their pride.

Now watch what they do next; most likely they will move the note to one of the corners of their desk and during the day they'll glance at it from time to time to repeat the dose of good feeling.

That's why written feedback is so much more effective than verbal; it keeps re-giving that praise.



## COMING NEXT MONTH

In the September 2015 issue of CA:  
the Finance Directors' Who's Who

And a small gift of recognition can pay even bigger dividends.

I took a team of engineers on a work assignment to France. The in-house travel office had just sorted out all the tickets and accommodation for us when one of the team had to pull out. A replacement was found but it meant new tickets, a different taxi, new booking details – in other words a lot of work last thing on a Friday afternoon.

While we were away we decided to club together and buy the travel office a thank you tin of typical French biscuits – which I handed delivered to them on my return. The effect was remarkable. The manager grabbed my hand as if I'd given him a winning lottery ticket. He rushed over to his team and explained what the biscuits were for. The tin of biscuits sat in the middle of the travel office for the next week. Visitors were offered a biscuit and proudly told the tale. That simple, cheap tin of biscuits gave a week of praise to that team... and a key lesson for every manager.

The next time I went to the travel office, what do you think the service was like? It was incredible. The lesson is clear; there are big performance gains to be had when teams feel valued and motivated.

If you want to motivate your staff celebrate small successes with small rewards on a regular basis. This way we reinforce that success is important to us, that we value our teams' efforts, and we make them feel good at the same time. It doesn't have to be anything big. A tin of biscuits or a tray of cakes will do the job. The payback on a small investment can be huge.

Finally, make sure staff understand that the treat is recognition for something specific. Just giving a treat without a link means staff won't necessarily recognise the praise or feel motivated by it. Timely praise produces powerful results; and if you do it right, it really can be simple. **CA**

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**PUBLISHED BY**  
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21 Haymarket Yards,  
Edinburgh EH12 5BH  
Tel: 0131 347 0100 Fax: 0131 347 0105  
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ISSN: 1352-9021

