

# Avoiding the quiet trap of 'appreciation depletion'



When we watch a puppy push its head forward eagerly at the promise of being scratched by a caring hand, guess what? We're watching ourselves. Walking around in a \$400 suit doesn't make us want that gentle head scratch any less.

"Most teams out there are experiencing 'appreciation depletion,'" said Tess Ausman, speaker and CEO of CLT Leads, to a webinar audience recently. "The reason it happens is that we all get so caught up in our routine that we run on auto-pilot. When that occurs, we de-prioritize recognizing and appreciating others.

"Here's how I see it manifested every day with teams: Forgetting to say 'thank you.' Not sending informal shout-outs. Not writing grateful emails or notes. We forget to do these things because we figure employees already know we appreciate them.

"Let me show you the effect of appreciation depletion," Ausman continued.

"In the beginning, your employee internalizes a lack of appreciation as basically ... nothing. It doesn't really matter to them. 'Oh, it's okay that he didn't recognize that I stayed up late to work on this project, or answer emails on my vacation. Hey, he's got a lot on his plate. We're not here to win awards, we're here to get things done.'

"But then, little by little, it starts to eat at them. That neutrality is not a sustainable feeling. It leads to denial: 'I really wish she would say thank you once a while ... and that kind of bothers me.' As they think these words, they don't believe it's going to go on forever, or that the oversights are truly getting under their skin.

"The longer this denial is allowed to fester, the greater chance of the employee falling into the dreaded valley of despair. This is where the dark thoughts enter their minds, and start to get shared with their co-workers and loved ones at home. 'I don't matter ... my work doesn't matter ... the boss doesn't care about what I do.'

"Nor do I understand anymore,' the employee thinks, 'how my work is connected to the success of the

company. The only thing my manager cares about is me showing up on time.'

"Giving feedback takes the employee out of this valley and gets them up to an exploration mindset, in which they see the light at the end of the tunnel and actively seek ways to feel content at work again; they've gotten that energy back. Finally, it leads them to a real commitment to us. But without continuous feedback, they'll slide right back down into the valley.

"But wait ... you might think I'm just talking about praise. Not true. Let's look at the difference between praise and positive feedback.

"Positive feedback: 'Hey Tess, when you showed up to the meeting early with a copy of the agenda for everybody, and a very clear set of next steps, we were not only impressed, it allowed us to make three critical decisions that will impact our go-live date. Thank you for always being so focused on preparedness and details.'

"Praise: 'Hey Tess, great job on yesterday's meeting!'

"And Tess thinks, 'Why? Because I had a nice shirt on? Because I spoke clearly?'

"Praise will briefly get someone out of the valley of despair, no question. But it won't always keep them from sliding back into it. Share specific behavior, and connect it to impact."

"Give this feedback verbally, by all means, but you get more bang for the buck if you write it down. Then the person reads it ... and reads it again ... and again. How many of you save great emails or handwritten cards you get? I have a folder of them.

"Someone who works for you should have one too."