

The power of a professional thank-you note

If the last time you remember penning an actual thank-you note was at age 10 when your mother insisted you couldn't spend the birthday money Aunt Helen sent until you wrote one, you're missing out on a simple way to connect with others—and enhance your own life.

"Taking the time to be grateful to someone and to express that gratitude literally changes your brain chemistry when practiced consistently," says Patti DeNucci, author of *The Intentional Networker*. "I can't think of anything more beautiful, satisfying or memorable than when someone says 'thank you' to me in some way, whether it's a quick email or text message or a beautifully penned, snail-mailed thank-you note."

Here's a look at the role of professional thank-you notes in various business settings:

Show appreciation to your staff

Employees like to know that management notices their efforts. Expressing gratitude boosts staff morale and can contribute to greater engagement and less turnover. A verbal, face-to-face "thank you" works well and should be a part of every leader's regular actions. Writing a thank-you note, however, provides the opportunity to expand on ideas. Any occasion when you feel genuinely appreciative of a team member is a good time to put pen to paper. Cross-cultural business consultant and author Sharon Schweitzer of Access to Culture offers these possible instances:

- Worker stays late to meet an important deadline.
- Worker completes someone else's project when person assigned couldn't do so.
- Worker goes above and beyond for an important client when no one else was willing to do so.
- Client expresses pleasure or delight with worker's work product/service level.
- Team collaborates to overcome significant obstacle.
- Team achieves significant success/milestone/goal.
- Team wins award or industry accolade.
- Worker provides constructive criticism or positive feedback to improve any aspect of the company.
- Worker is celebrating a one, five or 10-year anniversary of employment or service.

Concentrate on substance over length, and avoid generic language in favor of conveying appreciation for specific actions. Such focus encourages repeat behavior and shows you're truly paying attention, not just sending out mass-produced thank-you notes.

Need some inspiration? Try something like this:

Dear Nathan,

Thank you for going out of your way to help the team this past weekend by spending Saturday repairing an important piece of our heavy equipment. I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your expertise. We need this particular equipment for several jobs this quarter, and your actions in going above and beyond will allow us to stay on track to meet our goals.

Sincerely,

Joel

Note that personalized email serves the same purpose as handwritten notes. However, the latter generally possess greater impact because people receive them so infrequently. It also can be a nice gesture to send a copy to HR for the employee's file.

Strengthen network connections with a note

Professional thank-you notes can benefit other relationships, too. Mentors, vendors, clients, colleagues and others you interact with appreciate being recognized for their efforts.

Some situations DeNucci sees as ripe for offering thanks include:

- Upon receiving some great advice or a valuable introduction.
- If someone has taken the time to do you a big favor or sent you a gift or valuable resource or tip.
- After hearing someone speak—and you really resonated with what he said.
- If a book you read meant a lot to you and you want the author to know.
- After a meeting with a potential client.

She cautions, though, not to send a random thank-you purely to get attention or to “suck up” to someone higher up the ladder. Apply her simple advice —“Sincerity is key!” —every time you choose to write a thank-you note. Your thoughtful words undoubtedly will brighten their day!

Should you expect a thank-you note after interviewing someone?

In a word, yes. “A thank-you note is still proper etiquette after an interview, but not all job candidates realize this,” says Kelly Donovan, principal at Kelly Donovan & Associates, a firm that works with job seekers nationwide. “As a result, many candidates fail to send anything even if they are interested in the job.”

Though email (sent on the same day or the following one) has mostly replaced the long-standing practice of a handwritten note after the interview, some candidates still use snail mail. Savvy interviewees use the opportunity not only to express gratitude, but also to demonstrate passion or expand upon something discussed in the interview—and managers should take this into consideration. As Donovan notes, “Their willingness to put in this effort to advance their candidacy indicates a strong interest in the position.”