

As autumn leaves fall, and the crisp October weather sweeps in, now is the time many of us gather together to enjoy a hearty Thanksgiving meal. However you spend the holiday, it's difficult to argue with a sentiment that encourages us to pause, look around, and proclaim what we're most thankful for. As founders and leaders of fast-growing organizations, it's particularly important to take a beat and reflect on the blessings of the last year, quarter, or even *week*.

Spending some time to spotlight areas where your team is adding extra sparkle can generate some profound benefits. You owe it to your team (and yourself!) to talk about what is going well.

## Benefits of Saying Thanks

The simple act of showing your appreciation can have a *cornucopia* of positive side effects:

**Increases Connection:** Sharing from a positive personal level demonstrates vulnerability and shows people how much the work they do means to you.

**Creates Alignment and Buy-In:** People who believe that you care about the results they produce will strive to understand what a good result looks like to you.

**Higher Levels of Productivity:** Positivity is productive! [Donald Clifton](#), creator of one of our favourite tools, StrengthsFinder, suggested that [lack of recognition costs the U.S. economy \\$300 billion dollars a year in productivity](#). Acknowledging your people helps everyone generate a healthier, happier bottom line.

**Encourages a Collaborative Culture:** When employees feel appreciated, they're much more willing to spread positive ideas, and build stronger relationships among team members.

**Higher Employee Retention:** When people feel a strong sense of belonging, and feel recognized for their contribution to a company's success, *they stay*.

# Giving Thanks to Your Team

**1. Start by Looking in the Mirror:** Self-reflection is vital—but instead of berating yourself for every minor misstep, take time to appreciate yourself for the good work that you *have* done. Consider three things that you are especially proud of and write them down. If this exercise is especially challenging for you, ask for help from a friend, family member or a trusted colleague. It can be lonely at the top. You don't have a boss to give you positive reinforcement. You need to regularly take the time to give it to yourself. Appreciation is a fundamental physiological need, and a vital step toward leading yourself, in order to better lead others.

## **2. Observe & Reflect:**

a) **Stop & Listen:** If it's been awhile since you looked around to appreciate what is going well, *now* is always a good time. Observe how your team communicates, and shares time and space—even how they [share hilarious Giphy gifs on Slack](#). Reflect on these interactions, and look for positive behaviours that you can share with the team.

b) **Build an Appreciation Mindset:** Everyday, think about a couple of things that you appreciate about each person on your team. The next time you notice a team member living one of your company values, commend them on it. If you're having trouble coming up with positive traits for your team members, give BLANKSLATE Partners a call. This small hiccup is likely part of a much bigger issue that warrants discussion.

**3. Be Specific, Genuine, and Timely:** The key to great feedback is to ensure you are as truthful and specific as possible. Include the time, location, who was there, why you liked it, and what it meant to you, the team, and the company. Take the time to provide heartfelt feedback, don't just dole out fluffy feedback for the sake of it, as this can result in an adverse effect. Don't wait to tell someone they are doing a good job, instead take the opportunity to thank them in the moment.

**4. Cater Feedback to Each Individual:** customizing feedback is the hallmark of a great leader. Not everyone is going to enjoy an office parade celebrating how wonderful they are. Based on what you know about the individual, customize your delivery of the feedback, and the way you appreciate them. For some, a simple thank-you note, a few kind words, or a pat on the back may be appropriate; for others, a special lunch (don't underestimate the power of food!), or a shout-out at an all-company meeting can go a long way. Don't paint with a broad brush. Remember not everyone selling Mary Kay gets the pink Cadillac: *it has to be earned*. Be sure to level your recognition, and match your praise to the value of the behaviour.

**5. Create Rituals of Appreciation:** Don't just appreciate your team once, let them know that you see and hear what they are doing regularly. Frequent recognition and acknowledgement for a job well done is something they can expect from you. If your appreciation is delivered in an appropriate way, it can inspire your team to determine your expectations, and work hard to meet them. Parties are great, but taking time on regular intervals with weekly meetings, 1:1's, and happy hours show your team that they are a top priority. [Research has shown](#) that productivity can increase as the ratio of positive to negative feedback increases. Some appreciation rituals you can consider include:

Handwritten thank-you notes. While some may consider this old school, for the right person a thoughtful card can mean a lot.

When we're in hyper-growth mode, we tend to focus on where we need to improve, instead of areas where we're already winning. Try to get in the habit of recounting positive stories of times when something went well, and recognizing the people who played a part in it.

During company meetings, set aside a few minutes to share some appreciation for each other. Just remember to take into consideration who you are thanking, and how you thank them.

Each month, select a different team member, and thank them for a specific task/behaviour/action by taking them out to lunch.

# Coaching Vs. Giving Thanks

Everyone wants to know how they are performing in their jobs. They want to know that what they're doing *matters*. Carve out time for your team to present their work to you, *and* to provide them with coaching. What is the difference between coaching and giving thanks? When someone needs coaching/advice/support, they require assistance on how best to complete a task and meet your expectations. In contrast, employees who are looking for feedback often want their leader to appreciate the work they have done.

This communication may be new and uncomfortable, but directing your focus to the positive will have a big impact.

Showing appreciation doesn't require a huge budget or a massive amount of time. Developing the simple habit of *saying and giving thanks* is an easy win. Show your people how grateful you are that they've chosen to embark on this journey with you every day.