



The Power of Encouragement

In my talk, *The Law of the Harvest*, I spend time talking about how encouragement is “good seed” to *intentionally* plant with people. I point out how criticism is “bad seed” that many people are unknowingly planting in others that produce a “bad harvest” in life. Oftentimes we feel that if we just point out people’s weaknesses we can set out to improve upon these weaknesses.

Psychologists call encouragement “positive feedback.” Studies show that people will repeat good behavior when there is positive feedback. However, most of us are quick to point out flaws and, more times than not, withhold encouragement or positive feedback. *We don’t want them to think we are flattering them. We don’t want them to get the “big head.”*

When someone is trying to grow or please you and they get no feedback, psychologists call this behavior *extinction*. Why *extinction*? Probably because the person feels unnoticed and insignificant, finally deciding to give up the good behavior because it was overlooked. Therefore, the positive behavior becomes extinct, and the relationship is often damaged or, at best, void of an opportunity to grow. Unfortunately, providing no feedback is the most common response to good behavior. After all, we **expect** good behavior! “*Why should I have to thank them for doing well?*” is our entitlement response to good performance.

Criticism, or negative feedback, on the other hand demoralizes people. We think it is “constructive,” but if criticism is not surrounded by more encouragement and positive feedback, it simply tears people down. Psychologists estimate that it takes at least 10 positive encouragements to offset just one criticism to “break even” in the emotional bank account of that person.

Experts recommend that you spend 80% of your time and effort encouraging people in their strengths. Spending more than 20% of your time pointing out weaknesses merely hurts relationships, and rarely do people measurably improve on their weaknesses. Hire to someone’s strengths, and then hire around his or her weaknesses. This will insure that people are doing what they are gifted to do, leading to high satisfaction and high performance. Remember, encouraged people can do just about anything!

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