



## Get results through savvy motivation: Communication techniques for effective delegation.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in *Modern Steel Construction*

Lessons of love can be applied in the workplace. Who knew? In the *Five Love Languages*, author Gary Chapman identifies five ways to communicate positive messages to a romantic partner – by speaking in a language that best connects with the individual. His theory is that people receive love (a.k.a. positive reinforcement) in different ways. Once you discover their individual preference, then positive reinforcement will be sent and received with far more clarity.

In our professional lives, at one time or another we've all had people reporting into us (direct reports), while we also have someone that we report to (our boss). Even the CEO often reports to the Board of Directors, shareholders, or both. When we're in a role where we must delegate, there are communication techniques to make the most of the process (positive reinforcement, motivation, nurturing). I am borrowing four of Chapman's five love languages as a framework to present communication techniques that really work when delegating:

### **Speak up; express yourself!**

Your co-workers, colleagues, and direct reports need your feedback. While 'emotion' per se is often curbed in the business environment, there are many professionals out there that respond exceptionally well to positive affirmation. To develop their own career, they want to do what's good for the company and what's good for you — their boss. Verbal applause goes a long way: "You've made a difference; I'm proud of you and your contributions." "Your innovative approach added so much to the project; thanks for a job well done." "I've seen vast improvement in your work; keep it up."

The need for expression also holds true when the message is constructive. In a romantic partnership, the concept of keeping frustrations bottled up inside to fester and grow runs the risk of misinterpretation. Similarly, in the workplace, withholding constructive feedback can cause major damage. It is your responsibility to guide your direct reports, and ensure that they are crystal clear on where they stand, and how they can improve. How can you possibly expect someone to grow and succeed if they continue on, without any feedback on their performance?

### **Quality time; give attention.**

In today's fast paced, highly demanding work environment, we are often on the go — not truly taking the time to coach, listen, thoughtfully dialogue, and collaborate with our direct reports. Yes, we want them to self-start, be resourceful, and exhibit discipline. But to some extent, they need us, and we most certainly need them. How about carving out time to mentor your direct report? This is not limited to technical growth; for example, time together can be spent giving them exposure to clients and prospects. Perhaps you invite them to join you at a professional networking event; to entertain clients at a ballgame; to shadow you at a client meeting. Or maybe you make a point to take them off-site on a regular basis (put a recurring appointment in your calendar if you need to) for a one-on-one coffee sit down. And if you think you don't have time to devote this level of additional attention, think again. If you were to lose this person, or if you were to become disappointed in their lack of growth, how much more time (and expense) would it take you to replace them?

### **Gifts; tokens of appreciation.**

When I was about three years into my career, I remember my boss giving me a book on Chicago architecture from his personal collection. To him, I'm sure it was a small gesture; to me, I felt appreciated and heard. He selected that particular gift based upon

a personal interest of mine, and he offered it up not as a bribe, but as a way of expressing his thanks for my dedication in working with a demanding client. Sandra, a ZweigWhite colleague, was recently placed in a position to facilitate an important client meeting solo, thanks to travel debacles out of her control. In addition to the deserved kudos, she received a gift certificate as a thank you for stepping up, maintaining composure, and executing a job well done. Other tangible tokens to reward and motivate include: subscriptions to industry magazines; a ticket to a professionally-related event; an opportunity for special training; a favorite food; or simply a handwritten card.

### **Acts of kindness; demonstrating support.**

My friend Cynthia, Director of Planning at a Chicago engineering firm, is magic. Her direct reports have made it their personal goal to do great work for her. Cynthia is able to guide her staff to reach their own conclusions, working through challenges and helping them to reach the blissful 'ah-hah!' moments. But there's more. Cynthia demonstrates support by getting to know their challenges, both inside, and sometimes outside, of work. She's careful to not cross a line, but she most certainly promotes the concept of work-life balance. When someone works long hours to meet a deadline one week, she will let them take an afternoon off the next. When someone is facing challenges in their home-life and it's affecting their work, Cynthia coordinates opportunities with human resources to offer professional counseling. And, when someone is clearly bombarded with a host of other responsibilities (perhaps delegated to them by leaders outside of her department), Cynthia protects them by re-emphasizing the importance of having all planning-related tasks filter directly through her, so that she can distribute according to availability. She encourages her staff to speak up — and even say no — when their schedule has become overloaded and unreasonable. In this way, she works with them to re-prioritize the tasks. And she inquires of them about how she can help them to complete the tasks at hand in the most efficient way.

These four communication techniques will work well under one condition: you yourself must be willing to delegate, and delegate fairly. For those who find it difficult to share responsibility with others, here's a checklist for you to confirm your own ability to successfully delegate:

- Do you trust them?
- Do you have clarity on their skill sets and intellectual capacity?
- Do you articulate your expectations (in writing, if necessary)?
- Do you set a good example by delivering on your own commitments?
- Do you structure check-ins to track progress?
- Do you offer support and assistance?
- Do you put aside your own ego to recognize the valid contributions of others?

And finally, after reading this article, my final question of you, "Will you now make a concerted effort to understand — and deliver — the positive reinforcement 'language' that best resonates with each individual?"