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## WHAT WE APPRECIATE APPRECIATES

BY DAVID NELSON

In Western culture, we place a high value on problem solving and critical thinking, and many of us view the world through this lens. There is an underlying assumption there are problems that will cause harm or even death if we do not fix them. In our personal and professional lives, this attitude or assumption can become our reason for being. If we operate from this assumption, we pay attention to what is wrong. In every situation, we can find problems. I have even heard said of a person, “He is a crisis looking for a place to happen.”

Managing an office is both challenging and rewarding. As leaders, we can choose how to look at the experience. We can make choices about how we approach each task. Some people love to see themselves as “problem solvers,” even listing this claim on their resumes. If this is your focus and it fulfills you, fine. But remember, it is a choice. There is an alternative way to live. Life does not have to be seen as a problem to be solved. It can be recognized as a gift to be celebrated.

The dental industry has been a pioneer in health care, looking at health and business through a different lens. Instead of seeing the world as a problem to be solved, we have been leaders in promoting healthy lifestyles and health management. My grandfather’s dentistry practice was focused primarily on discovering problems and trying to fix them. Many of his patients rarely visited his office except to address a toothache or a dental problem. Today, dentists support individuals in maintaining a positive lifestyle that keeps oral health on a positive track. Certainly, we address problems as they arise, but the primary focus can be on discovering what is working well and building on those actions. I now visit my dentist on a regular basis for cleaning and consultation about a healthy lifestyle. When I do need special attention, it is in the context of a positive relationship that has already been clearly established. I come with less fear and more confidence in a positive outcome.

Office managers and staff do not need to become detectives searching for problems. The joy is to discover what works and set up systems for success. As individuals, we can operate from a different set of assumptions. Life is open to infinite interpretations and our focus creates our reality. It makes sense to focus on the most life-affirming aspects of every situation, especially when

working in an office where people come in on a regular basis. The task is not to discover and solve problems but to listen to sweet success and celebrate it. What we focus on grows and becomes a bigger part of life. What we appreciate appreciates.

A common practice in many offices is to take surveys of employee and customer satisfaction. These surveys offer an opportunity to identify what is working and what needs attention. In my opinion, you will increase morale by focusing on the successes rather than attempting to address the failures. I encourage you to explore the reactions of your satisfied employees and happy customers. Find out what you are doing that is adding value to people’s lives and then plan to do even more. People love to tell stories of success. Don’t just oil the squeaky wheel. Listen to the satisfied employee and happy customer.

Earl Nightingale wrote years ago, “People become what they think about, most of the time.” What do you want to become? What do you want your office to be noted for? How do you want to be remembered? People and organizations move in the direction of the stories they tell. This was the subject of my column several months ago. The research keeps adding up. If we really want to encourage satisfaction, let’s tell stories and make plans based on satisfaction. What we appreciate appreciates.

Most people tend to notice the same things over and over in a situation. When you walk into an office or a workplace, there are an infinite number of things that can capture your attention. You




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can notice characteristics of the room such as colors, pictures, plants, magazines, lighting, and sounds. Try this sometime. Visit your office with a new set of eyes and ears. Tell yourself you have never been inside this room before. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? What thoughts are playfully dancing in your mind? What is the impression you begin to form with all this information? What are the items that bring most joy and satisfaction to you? How can you increase these positive attributes? What we appreciate appreciates.

Reality is what we observe. We used to think there was a given and fixed reality for us to enter and cope with. This thinking still exists in some places, but it no longer needs to stifle us. Reality is something we create. We can choose the world we live in. Every

day, we make choices that create new possibilities or keep us stuck in old prisons. Through telling stories and listening to others, we create the world of our homes and our offices. Celebrate if your child does something you like. Rejoice when your life partner treats you in ways that make you feel good and make your love grow. Party hardy when your office communicates and performs in the way that creates a positive work place and excellence in service. What we appreciate appreciates. 

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