

# 10 Things Employees Really Need to Hear From You

By: Geoffrey James

*A former CEO provides the exact words you need to say when employees need a morale boost.*

I usually don't get very excited about business books, but I recently ran across one that's really powerful: *Finding Happiness: One Man's Quest to Beat Depression and Anxiety and--Finally--Let the Sunshine In*, by former CEO Todd Patkin.

Patkin has identified 14 phrases that really improve morale when they come from the boss. Here are the 10 that impressed me the most:

## 1. "I need your help."

You aren't Superman (or Wonder Woman) and your employees know it, so don't pretend to know all the answers or pretend that you can get along fine without your employees and their skills.

Rather than losing respect for you as a leader, they'll appreciate that you treated them as valued partners--and they'll feel more invested in your company's future because they had more of a hand in creating it.

## 2. "What do you need from me?"

Often, employees are anxious about asking the boss for what they need, because they may fear a harsh response, they want to avoid looking needy, or they simply feel that it's not their place to ask for more than you've already provided.

By explicitly asking what you can give them, you extend permission for your people to make those requests--and they'll certainly appreciate it. If you can't give an employee what she asks for, explain why and work with her to find another solution.

## 3. "I noticed what you did."

Every day, your employees do a lot of "little" things that keep your company running smoothly and customers coming back, including refilling the copier and double-checking reports for errors before sending them on.

Employees want to know that you notice and value the mundane parts of their jobs, not just the big wins and achievements. Make it your mission to catch as many of your employees as possible doing stuff right.

## 4. "Thank you."

Whether you say, "Thanks for staying late last night," "Thanks for being so patient with Mrs. Smith--I know she can be a difficult customer," or something else, your people treasure your appreciation more than you realize.

People love to hear positive feedback about themselves, and in most cases, they'll be willing to work a lot harder to keep the compliments and thanks coming. Praise, especially when it comes from an authority figure, is incredibly fulfilling.

## 5. "Hey, everyone--listen to what Joe accomplished!"

Everybody loves to be recognized and complimented in front of their peers. So don't stop with a compliment when an employee experiences a win--tell the rest of the team, too!

Whether correctly or incorrectly, many employees feel that their leaders point out only their mistakes in front of the group, so make it your daily mission to prove that perception wrong.

## **6. "What would you like to do here?"**

Sure, you originally hired each of your employees to do specific jobs. But over time, your company has grown and changed--and so have your people. Therefore, it's a good idea to check in with each one of them periodically to ask what everyone would like to be doing.

No, you won't always be able to accommodate an employee's preferences. But keep job descriptions within your company fluid, and allow your people to have a say in matching their skills to the company's needs.

## **7. "I have bad news."**

Your instinct might be to play down negative developments, or even keep them to yourself entirely. However, your employees deserve to hear the truth from you as soon as possible.

Employees aren't stupid and will be able to tell when something is up even if you don't acknowledge it. By refusing to share bad news, you'll only increase paranoia and anxiousness--neither of which is productive.

## **8. "What do you think?"**

Employees who are simply told what to do feel like numbers or cogs in a machine, and as a result their performance becomes grudging and uninspired. By contrast, you make your employees feel like valued partners by asking for their opinions, ideas, and preferences.

They'll be much more invested in your organization's success because they had an active part in creating it. And guess what? Your employees probably won't care as much as you think if their suggestions don't become reality. Mostly, they just want to be heard.

## **9. "That's OK. We all make mistakes."**

Lambasting employees who dropped the ball may make you feel better, but it will damage their self-confidence, their relationship with you, and their feelings for your company.

Take a deep breath and remind yourself that the employee feels very bad already, and that yelling or lecturing won't change the past. Instead, focus on figuring out what went wrong and how to keep it from happening again.

## **10. "I know you can do it."**

Of course, you should try to hire employees who are confident and self-directed. But even the most self-assured individuals appreciate an explicit vote of confidence from their leaders!

Constantly challenge your people, and push them to improve while reassuring them that you believe in them. Everyone, no matter how capable or experienced the person is, appreciates encouragement.

<http://www.inc.com/geoffrey-james/10-things-employees-desperately-want-to-hear.html>