

## **Effects of Praise**

You know people are more likely to be persuaded to say “yes” when you make them feel good about themselves, their work, and their accomplishments. People will do almost anything for you when you treat them with respect and dignity and show them that their feelings are important.

I remember going to try on suits at the local mall. I was thinking about buying a suit but I was pretty indifferent about making a purchase that day. I knew the sales representative would want to persuade me to buy a suit that same day, however, so I came in prepared for his persuasive techniques. He asked, “What type of suit were you looking for?” I answered, “Blue, double breasted.” “What size are you?” he asked. I said, “I’m not sure.” He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and asked, “Do you work out?” I said, “Yes, I do.” He said, “I thought so. You will need a suit that has an athletic cut.” I smiled and felt the rush of esteem. I knew he was attempting to sell me a suit, and it worked. I took the bait and he reeled me in. It was something so simple yet so powerful. Yes, I did go home that day with a new suit.

An experiment testing the effects of praise on a group of men in North Carolina was very insightful. The men received different types of comments from someone who needed a favor from them. The comments were either positive, negative, or a mixture of both. As you might expect, the person giving the positive comments was liked the best. Secondly, this conclusion held true even when the men knew their “complimenter” was seeking a favor. Finally, unlike the other types of comments, pure praise did not have to be accurate to work. Positive comments produced just as much liking toward the flatterer when they were untrue as when they were true. Strive to be sincere in your praise, although flattery works even if it is not.

This example shows the immense strength that praise has. At a small college in Virginia, twenty-four students in a psychology course decided to see if they could use compliments to change the way the women on campus dressed. For a while, they complimented all the female students who wore blue. It caused the wearing of blue outfits to rise from 25% to 38% of the female population. The researchers then switched to complimenting any woman who wore red. This caused the appearance of red on campus to double, from 11% to 22%. These results indicate that when you favorably comment on behavior, that behavior will increase.

Praise can also cause people to change their minds. In another study, student essays were randomly given high or low marks. When surveyed, the students who had gotten A’s tended to lean even more favorably in the direction of the positions they had advocated in their essays. Students who had received failing marks, however, did not stand behind their previous positions as willingly.

When we show people that they are important, we can persuade them to do many things. In elementary schools, teachers will dub a child to be the king or queen for the day. The king receives a crown and the other students write notes of praise. Children keep these sayings for years to come, proof that no matter our age we crave praise, recognition and

acceptance. Dale Carnegie devised a plan to sell his steel to the Pennsylvania Railroad. When he built a new steel mill in Pittsburgh, he named it the J. Edgar Thompson Steel Works, after the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Thompson was so flattered by the honor that he thereafter purchased steel exclusively from Carnegie.

The greatest car salesman in the world sends 13,000 former customers a card every month that simply says, "I like you" then signs his name. You can calculate the expense, but this is the backbone of his business. No one has sold more cars than Joe Girard. Of course, there is an opposite effect that also lasts a lifetime. I heard a story of a young lady who wanted to learn how to dance. She went to take lessons but she was having a hard time. The dance steps were unfamiliar and awkward for someone who had never danced before. The instructor gave her a few lessons and then unsympathetically said, "You dance like a hippo. You will never be a good dancer." This one comment kept the young lady off the dance floor for the rest of her life.

One negative comment has more power than ten positive comments. I can give a seminar and have twenty people come up to me and praise me. But it is the one person in the front row, the one who had a sour face the whole time, whom I will remember. Just keep in mind that the use of praise affects the very core of our beings, so use it with caution.

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