

## **The Leader: Affirming**

by **Frederick E Roach**

One of the leaders most effective tools is affirmation. Those who use it have learned the truth of what Solomon wrote: "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." (Proverbs 12: 25) A small investment in a positive word or action, for a job well done, pays tremendous dividends.

To affirm is to make a firm declaration. The clearer and stronger the declaration, the more effective the affirmation. Webster's Dictionary said that, in affirming the action of others, you give "your stamp of approval." Followers, associates, family members, friends all want our stamp of approval on their accomplishments.

As we're thinking about customer service, it's important to discuss a key ingredient in maintaining strong relationships with our No. 1 internal customer -- our fellow employee. Affirmation is a way to say "Yes" to the action of someone with whom we work. It validates their work, and serves a way to express positive feelings toward others.

It is great that some people are naturally affirming! Most of us have to take time to think about it, even work at affirming others. But creating the best possible working environment is worth the effort. When practiced regularly, affirmation can be learned; it can become part of our natural leadership behavior.

Affirmation creates a friendlier workplace. It's noticed by others, including our patients. Baylor has a friendly atmosphere. Can our individual actions make it better? Yes! Eugene H. Peterson, author of *The Message*, paraphrased Proverbs 15:23: "Congenial conversation " what a pleasure! The right word at the right time " beautiful"! Then, in Proverbs 18:22: "A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone tired."

What does this say to me? It says that as a leader, as a fellow worker, I have the responsibility to make "congenial conversation." One way I can do that is to affirm the work and worth of the people with whom I work. I like the results of a "cheerful disposition." Affirmation is one way to avoid "gloom and doom"!

## ***Some Basics About Affirmation***

### **1. We All Need It**

There's a basic need we all share: to be assured we're doing a good job. We express this as children, and throughout our adult lives. Affirmation helps keep us psychologically and emotionally healthy.

### **2. It Requires Understanding**

To provide the most meaningful affirmation, we should strive to understand the individual we're affirming. Some of us need more external affirmation than others. Many people have learned to affirm themselves. Affirmation motivates us to accomplish more.



### 3. **Methods Are Important**

We don't necessarily affirm every person the same way. Our methods ought to fit the person and the situation. Baylor's "Five Star Spirit" program is a uniform means for us to affirm and thank our fellow employees.

### 4. **It Needs To Be Fair**

People watch what leaders do! They recognize our fairness with our associates. Just as in any family, we always can find something special about every person and affirm them individually.

### 5. **Recognize Special Effort**

Sometimes, affirmation needs to be moved to a higher level. When someone has accomplished something extraordinary, make your affirmation extraordinary. Use group affirmation, or plan a special activity to celebrate the person's accomplishment.

### 6. **It Builds Relationships**

Regular, meaningful affirmation builds relationships. We've also observed that lack of appropriate affirmation damage can relationships, and at times, irreparably. Positive action toward others reinforces relationships.

### 7. **Public Or Private?**

There are times for both public and private affirmation. Generally, we benefit the most in the business world when we affirm our fellow employees in front of their peers. Yet we also appreciate affirmation from associates in a private setting.

### 8. **It Takes Time**

If we believe that affirmation will help build our working relationships, then the time it takes is a small investment. It takes more effort than time to say, "Thanks for a great job," or to write an affirming note or make that telephone call.

### 9. **It Produces Positive Results**

Affirmation not only affects the person praised, but becomes beneficial within their circle of influence. To be praised creates adrenaline that makes us more effective. When my wife tells me I'm doing a great job with the dishes, believe me -- the entire kitchen gets extra attention.

### 10. **It Is Contagious**

Affirmation breeds affirmation! When we positively affect another person's life, that starts a chain reaction of positive vibrations. Affirmation needs to be real! When sincerely felt and conveyed, affirmation will be reciprocated. It helps build a more positive environment.