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Believe in yourself

Why it's important to get from 'Aw; shucks' to 'Wow; thanks!'

By **Jo Hawkins Donovan**, for *Small Business Times*

One of my granddaughters, Cassy Jo, is a natural appreciator of people. Since she was about 3 years old, sincere compliments have rolled off her lips with the greatest of ease. "I like your haircut." Or, "I like your shoes." Or, "I like how you make a sandwich."

She was surprisingly young to be noticing and acknowledging other people. Still, everyone liked it just fine and to this day, her ease at applauding others is one of her many charms.

Recently I attended an advanced coaching conference, and one topic we talked about and practiced was "Championing the Client." You've heard this from me before — that the coach's only goal is the client's success. We help clients achieve results through awareness and problem solving.

Often, part of that awareness piece involves guiding the client to recognition of a blind spot when it comes to his or her own talents. Until people believe they have greatness, compliments from others are just plain suspect.

A very talented client reminded me of an interesting quirk about this. The more an ability seems "natural" to someone, the more likely that someone will think, "Well anyone can do that; it's nothing."

The paradox (and I do love a paradox) is that if something seems effortless, that's a clue that it emanates from a deep gift within, a natural talent that blossoms from and needs the nourishment of applause.

At our coaching conference, we were asked to tell a partner about some things we had accomplished. Then we were to tell that partner exactly how to compliment, or "champion" us about the accomplishment, down to what words to say.

Well, I thought this exercise would seem phony and weird, my partner in the exercise just parroting back what I told her. To my surprise, she somehow made those same words her own, and they came back to me with authenticity and warmth. I felt truly acknowledged.

When we debriefed from the exercise, I learned other coaches experienced the same surprise. We played around with this "championing" topic during lunch as well. I was reminded of how much we need acknowledgement — from the outside world and ourselves.

One of the challenges is to create an environment where that need gets met. It would be heavenly if everyone around us knew we needed acknowledgement, and just how to couch it so that it really hit home.

One of my clients came to recognize that he needed "acclaim." He said this with a bit of embarrassment, but hey — we probably all need some measure of acclaim. We get enough criticism by the time we're 18 to last throughout life — and that's even in the best of families.

So what can you do to get the recognition you need and deliver it to others in your environment? First, if you have trouble believing that compliments are sincere, instead of whisking them aside, chew on them a while and respond with a clean "Thank you!"

Start complimenting yourself regularly, inside your brain and out loud. Some clients tell me they fear getting an inflated ego from doing this. Don't worry. As long as you're honest with yourself, you will simply start to even out all that criticism you've given yourself over the years.

You can also do your own version of our exercise at the conference. Even if you feel a little uncomfortable, let people know that you need recognition.

Give them examples of how you'd like that, even the wording if appropriate. Admit to your discomfort. Tell people you need to feel more valued, and how they can help.

Ask your employees how they like to be acknowledged. I am sure they need recognition, and I am sure they have preferences about how it is delivered. Again, don't worry about overkill as long as you're honest. Tell them what you appreciate, and make it personal, not just a blanket "You're-a-good-team-player" kind of statement. Describe a particular behavior you observed: "You know, during that client meeting, you established a link so quickly by sharing your love for Harleys after seeing that picture on her wall."

We all long to be noticed — in a positive way.

You don't have to be a coach to be a champion. You can just decide to "champion" a colleague, your spouse, your kids. Start with yourself. I know you are magnificent. Somewhere deep in there, you know it too. I can't think of any good reason to keep your magnificence a secret during your stay on this planet.



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