



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

[Print Page](#) [Close Window](#)

## Recognition

Dane Peters

“Chris, the job you did helping that student and her family with understanding the grading system was brilliant. I hope you don’t mind if I use your manner and words as an example when I speak to other faculty members.”

“Yes, Chris, it *was* that good, and I appreciate your jumping in and taking the lead on so many student-parent issues.” “Thank you.”

Does this conversation sound at all familiar to you—a conversation initiated by you to a co-worker at school?

Making sure that we recognize our colleagues, students, volunteer workers, and employees adds energy and credibility to work environments and builds a culture of appreciation. The people for whom I work, who work for me, or with whom I work—whether a volunteer, student, or co-worker—always appreciate being recognized for their efforts. I know how much I value being appreciated for the work that I do. Well-deserved recognition adds value to the work being done and inspires people to continue that good work.

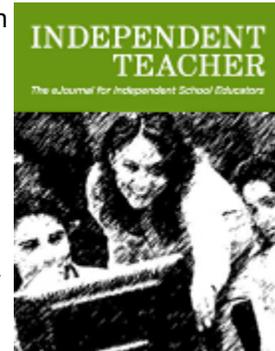
At the American Montessori Society Annual Conference in San Diego in October 2010, I attended the session “Inspiring Your Faculty and Staff” by educator Betsy Hoke. The presenter opened her talk by saying that she would outline ten principles for inspiration. Those principles included Create the Atmosphere, Model What You Want, Support the Improvement of Weaknesses and Challenges, and Encourage Collegiality, but the number one principle was Fill the Bucket, her language for giving recognition.

The timing used in giving recognition is particularly important. I am reminded when I used to play with my sons in their preschool years. One of them would sneak up and startle me, and I would jump; there followed the usual giggling with “Daddy, I scared you.” My reply was always, “Ah ha, I guess it is my turn to get you.” That inevitably caused them to think about what they did, realize that they did not want to be

surprised the way they surprised me, and they would say, “Daddy, go ahead and scare me now.” I would immediately respond with, “Not now. I will do it when you least expect it.” They thought about that and would say, “Daddy, Daddy, I am least expecting it now. Do it now, Daddy.” Recognizing people’s work when they least expect it can have the most value when demonstrating an appreciation for what one has accomplished. It is more about being an intrinsic reward rather than an extrinsic reward—receiving something expected for work accomplished.

Here are several experts in the field from whom I draw my experience on the importance of recognition:

**Making sure that we recognize our colleagues, students, volunteer workers, and employees adds energy and credibility to work environments and builds a culture of appreciation.**



- In Dr. Edward Hallowell's most recent book, *Shine*, he outlines The Five Steps to Igniting Peak Performance. Step five talks about "why doing well—shining—feels so good, why noticing it when a person shines is so critical, and why a culture that helps people shine inevitably becomes a culture of self-perpetuating excellence."
- In the Winter 2011 issue of *Independent School* magazine, editor Michael Brosnan interviewed the author of the popular book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, Dan Heath. Heath talked about finding the bright spots when navigating change. He continued that organizations need to change this inclination of always trying to fix problems, and, instead, think about what's working today and how can they do more. Recognizing people for what they are doing right gets more for an organization, colleagues, and most importantly, for the person being recognized.
- "Inner Work Life – Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance," an article by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J Kramer in the May 2007 *Harvard Business Review*, is clear about how the inner work life (emotions and perceptions) of a worker is highly enriched when management employs a "human touch," takes an interest in what workers are doing, establishes clear goals, emphasizes intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards, enables progress, and reacts to worker successes and failures with a learning orientation. The article emphasizes the direct correlation between the above and worker performance.
- One of my favorite authors on management and leadership is Patrick Lencioni, who has written a book devoted to helping leaders understand the dynamic between leader and follower. *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job* presents anonymity, irrelevance, and "immeasurement" (Lencioni's term for "not providing an employee with feedback") as the three signs that bring about job misery. Much like the work of Heath, Hallowell, and Amabile and Kramer, Lencioni also looks at the worker as a human being. Being fully appreciated in the workplace—be it a factory, school, office, or the home—is essential for a productive work environment; people need to feel valued.
- Tony Schwartz's *The Way We Are Working Isn't Working* reiterates for me what recognition is all about. "The need for significance at work is a manifestation of our inborn hunger for meaning in our lives . . . Meaning and significance may seem like luxuries, but they're a unique source of energy that ignites passion, focus, and perseverance."

On New Year's morning I was listening to "Weekend Edition" on NPR, and a segment on retirement and baby boomers caught my ear. When the reporter asked the 60-something he was interviewing what it was he hoped for most in his retirement, he said, "financial sustainability." I thought for a brief moment and asked myself what I wanted most. I came to the quick conclusion that it was to have meaning in my life, rapidly thinking about Viktor E. Frankl's seminal book, *Man's Search for Meaning* and how his analysis of survivors of World War II concentration camps came down to having something to get up for each morning. Those who felt that they were needed survived. His search for meaning in life adds the important ingredient to leadership. Be it emotional or practical, people need to feel valued and appreciated in their work. With or without recognition, people need to have goals, know that they are valued in their work place, and feel that their work makes a difference in life in order to feel satisfaction in what they do.

In the end, whether you are working with a student, a teacher, a colleague, or a school, take the time to promote conversations that recognize people and what they are doing.

"I need your help on completing the project. I know I can do it on my own, but it would not be as good or as enjoyable if I did not have your knowledge and enthusiasm. In the end, it will be so much better if we do it together."

"Thank you."

---

Dane L. Peters is Head of Brooklyn Heights Montessori School in Brooklyn, NY. You can reach him at [dpeters@bhmsny.org](mailto:dpeters@bhmsny.org). Visit his blog at <http://daneseblog.blogspot.com/>

## References

- Amabile, T. and Kramer, S. (May 2007). "Inner Work Life Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance" Cambridge, MA: *Harvard Business Review*
- Brosnan, M. (Winter 2010). "Interview with Dan Heath" Washington, D.C.: *Independent School*
- Frankl, V. (2006), *Man's Search for Meaning*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press
- Hallowell, E. (2011). *Shine*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press
- Heath, D. and C. (2009). *Switch How to Change Things When Change is Hard*. Broadway Books
- Hoke, B. (October 2010). "Inspiring Your Faculty and Staff" American Montessori Annual Conference: San Diego, CA
- Lencioni, P. (2008). *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*. Boston, MA: Wiley
- National Public Radio *Weekend Edition Saturday* (January 1, 2011) "Boomers Take the 'Retire' Out of Retirement"
- Schwartz, T. (2010). *The Way We Are Working Isn't Working*. New York: Free Press

---

National Association of Independent  
Schools  
1620 L Street NW Suite 1100  
Washington DC, 20036-5695

NAIS is the national voice of independent  
education. We offer standards, targeted  
resources, and networking opportunities for our  
1,300 member schools.

Tel (202) 973-9700  
Email [Customer Support](#)

© 1997-2011 ALL RIGHTS  
RESERVED