



RESILIENCY, SOCIAL SUPPORT & APPRECIATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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The U.S. government and all branches of the armed forces have identified the development of resiliency in those who serve in the military as a key goal to strengthen our military personnel over the long term. As a result, for the past 10 years both research and resources have been focused on determining how to make service members more able to “bounce back” after experiencing stressful and/or traumatic events during their service.

Much research and emphasis has been focused on identifying individual characteristics, coping skills, and environmental factors that can help servicemen and women:

- a) become more prepared to manage the stressful events experienced in life;
- b) strengthen their ability to cope successfully with demanding life circumstances, including deployment and home-based service;
- c) improve their ability to recover from difficult experiences more quickly and more fully, being better able to continue to serve our country.

One of the most consistent factors found in promoting resilience has been social support. When military personnel are connected relationally to those with whom they serve, along with friends and family, their ability to cope with stressful and traumatic situations consistently is significantly greater than their colleagues who do not have an active social support system in their lives.

While supportive relationships with family and friends are obviously important, having positive, affirming relationships with those with whom you work is also critical. Consider that even when not deployed, military servicemen and women spend 70-80% of their waking hours with their colleagues. When deployed the percentage is often 90% and higher.

The quality of the relationships among team members, units, colleagues and supervisors has been shown to be a key factor in the quality of work that is accomplished. When team members feel supported, and receive affirmation for the contributions they make to their unit, they are more likely to follow policies and procedures regularly, miss shifts less often, get along better with their colleagues (less conflict over minor issues), and the quality of their work is deemed to be better by the recipients of their work.

There is a significant difference, however, between traditional performance awards in the military and communicating authentic appreciation. In fact, employee recognition activities are often viewed cynically due to their lack of genuineness (or when the individual is asked to write their own letter of commendation)!

Fortunately, there is hope. An individual's and a unit's ability to constructively deal with stressful life experiences in the course of military service can be improved by facilitating healthy, authentic relationships with their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. This can occur through teaching them how to communicate authentic appreciation and encouragement to one another in the ways that are meaningful to each person. Over the past 5 years in working with businesses, military personnel, government agencies, medical facilities, schools and not-for-profit organizations, we have identified three foundational principles regarding appreciation in the workplace:

1. Not everyone feels appreciated (or encouraged) in the same ways. (In fact, the most common language of appreciation is only preferred by 40% of individuals; so there are a variety of ways people desire to be encouraged.)
2. Team members want to be valued and appreciated both by their supervisors and their colleagues. A "top down" approach will only be minimally effective. The most supportive relationships in day-to-day work life is provided by one's peers.
3. If the appreciation communicated is not viewed as authentic, you are "dead in the water". In fact, when supervisors (or co-workers) communicate appreciation that is viewed as inauthentic, trust in the relationship is immediately undermined.

Learn how to enhance your unit's resiliency by helping them develop truly supportive work relationships. Help them discover the simple steps to communicate appreciation to their colleagues in ways that will be viewed as meaningful. Assist leaders and colleagues in avoiding the actions that actually undermine supportive relationships when they "go through the motions" and try to fake appreciation that is not really there.

We have developed resources to help supervisors and team members learn how to encourage one another and build stronger social ties between colleagues. Our structured *Appreciation At Work* training materials have had positive results within multiple branches of the military. And we have developed a version of our *Motivating By Appreciation Inventory* specifically for military use, addressing the issues around fraternization and gift-giving unique to military relationships.

For more information about these resources and our book, *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in The Workplace*, visit our website www.appreciationatwork.com. Or contact us directly at 316-681-4428 or admin@appreciationatwork.com and let us answer any questions you may have.

