



Real Men Don't Need Encouragement (False)

Sometimes we hear from someone with whom we are working say: “I don't need to be encouraged.” “I don't need anyone to tell me ‘You are doing a good job’. I encourage myself. Others may need to feel appreciated, but I don't.”

But what we have found, when we dig deeper with these individuals (and being frank, they are usually men), is that they have a very narrow definition of encouragement or appreciation. What they usually mean is: “Receiving direct verbal praise or compliments from others isn't that important to me” (which may be true.) And many people have learned to be more self-motivating than looking to others for encouragement and support. And that is great.

But let's frame the issue a bit differently. First, let's acknowledge that, generally speaking, work is difficult (especially over the long haul). Work would be easy if it was just that – doing our job. But the reality is – there are all kinds of challenges and obstacles that we encounter in the midst of trying to do our job that really make work more difficult. Consider the following list of common occurrences that happen within our workdays:

- computer problems
- others not getting their work done on time or correctly
- losing customers to competitors
- payments coming in late
- financial difficulties (funding not coming in, loans not being approved)
- staff problems, employees resigning
- personal/family issues, health problems
- transportation challenges (stuck in traffic, air travel delays)
- mail or email getting lost
- the copier or printer doesn't work
- running out of materials needed to do the job
- important meetings being delayed
- changes mandated by the organization's leadership

- economic difficulties that negatively impact sales or funding
- changes in governmental rules and regulations that create more work

All of us experience one or more of these challenges every week. And that is what makes work difficult. How many times have you thought (or said): “All I want to do is my job. Just leave me alone so I can get my work done!” The problem is: “work” includes dealing with all of these other issues as well. That is what is wearing on us.

Now, even though there are individuals who don’t need much verbal affirmation, if we also take away all the various kinds of rewards that are intrinsic in doing our work, the reality becomes evident. We all need encouragement to keep going – it just comes in different forms. Consider the following benefits we may experience from doing our work:

- a personal sense of well being when completing a task
- repeat business or referrals to new customers
- growth in our skills and experience
- learning how to do tasks better (sometimes through mistakes we make)
- financial compensation (payment for goods & services)
- realizing a profit
- appreciation from customers & clients
- compliments from others (colleagues, vendors, customers, competitors, business friends)
- suggestions for new and improved goods or services you could provide
- creating a positive reputation in the community
- acknowledgements by your peers (professional organizations, trade associations, awards from civic organizations)
- publicity in local or regional media (newspaper, business publications, television)
- ability to grow your business/organization to serve more people
- quality products and/or high level services provided
- others calling you to set up appointments to spend time with you (lunch, business meetings)
- verbal comments and compliments from those you work with.

So, here's the reality check. Take the circumstances from the first list, take away all of the positive rewards from the second list, and honestly tell yourself that, over a long period of time, you wouldn't become worn down and eventually, discouraged. Work takes time, mental and physical energy, and emotional effort. Without some positive feedback, we become "burned out".

While it is true that there are certain individuals who don't value direct verbal affirmation, all of us do need something to "keep going". How we are encouraged and feel supported varies, to be sure. But as the famous poet, John Donne said, "No man is an island." We all need encouragement – just in different ways. So don't allow yourself to be hoodwinked or misled by the 'tough guy' who says: "Real men don't need encouragement." He just may not need to hear it verbally as much as others do. But find out what his true language is. At some point, he will need some encouragement, too.

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