

Something to Look Forward To...or Not!

"High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation."

- Jack Kinder

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

You've been assigned a road improvement project that is highly contentious. What is your first reaction? Expectation or dread? Take a moment to think about your answer. It's critical. This is where you begin to form an attitude about your potential achievement.

As a novice agent, I was asked to follow up on some of the outstanding easements for an aerial utility extension project. Seeing that the job folder was massive, did I feel a sense of expectation or dread? Innately a positive thinker, even with butterflies soaring in my stomach, I thought, definitely expectation.

Dialing the owner's phone number, I could feel my throat tighten as the phone started ringing. Worried that the owner would have a hostile attitude, I quickly blurted out my introduction and the reason for my call. As I paused for his response, I realized that my attitude had turned to dread. Could I turn it back to expectation? Of course I could! Soon my courage began to shoo away those pesky butterflies, and the result was a signed easement.

The response we choose determines whether we look forward to something—or not. How we view our situation can move us forward, even if we only take small steps at first. Every step forward strengthens our focus and works to fuel further expectations. Unfortunately, the demands at work can slowly chip away the veneer of expectations, and our frustration can escalate. How can we develop a thick skin against discouragement and defeat?

The solution is simple. We can keep ourselves encouraged by encouraging others. By nurturing others to success, we create a positive attitude for ourselves.

Here are a few techniques you can use to support others:

Acknowledge What's Important to Them: Whether we want to admit it, everyone craves acknowledgement. Affirmation is essential to confidence and self-esteem. When you acknowledge what's important to others, you provide them with a form of validation about who they are and the importance of what they're doing.

Show Genuine Interest: Express interest by asking questions. Get them talking. Listen intently to their issues, concerns, wants, needs, desires. By showing sincere interest, we demonstrate that we care.

Give Praise: Worthwhile things take time and effort, and along the way, people need assurance to keep focused on their task. Even just a few words of encouragement can make a difference between something they look forward to or something they dread.

Offer to Lend a Hand: Too many people wait to be asked for help or advice. But not everyone knows how to ask. Be proactive and offer to lend a hand. By showing that you are willing to commit your own time and energy, you can inspire the other person to become more committed to seeing a task through to completion.

Share A Word of Thanks: Common courtesy and good manners can also go a long way. A simple word of thanks shows that what they had done was meaningful and had not gone unnoticed.

One morning, on my way to a project meeting, I decided to grab a quick breakfast. The meeting agenda would be focused on an ongoing issue, and I wasn't looking forward to it.

While sipping coffee, I noticed a janitor pushing a mop as he scrubbed the floor. His face was weathered with deep lines. His cheeks were gaunt as though missing teeth had caused his face to sink inward. But what impressed me was his strong work ethic. When he couldn't clean up the sticky residue from someone's dropped food, he'd scrape it up with his finger. He'd pick up trash along the way.

Grabbing my check, I felt compelled to thank the man for doing a good job. As I walked past him, I said, "Excuse me, I'd like to..." but stopped when I saw the scowl on his face. I proceeded, this time with a smile, saying, "Thank you for your hard work. The floor sparkles." He slowly smiled, revealing several missing teeth. "I appreciate that, Ma'am." And the lines on his face seemed to fade.

I wondered how long it had been since he received a nice word. I pushed through the door and glanced back at him. He was still smiling. Once outside, I began thinking about that project meeting. Had I mentioned I was dreading it? But now, I was ready for it, no longer anxious, but anticipating success instead. A small gesture of encouragement aimed at lifting someone else's spirit had actually done wonders to change my own attitude.

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