

The Power of a Compliment

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Mark Twain once said, “I can live two months on one good compliment.” Couldn’t we all? Let’s look at three reasons why compliments are important.

1. They can encourage others in their pursuit of goals and dreams. Walt Whitman was discouraged for years about *Leaves of Grass* because no one seemed interested. Then one day he received a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson complimenting his writing.

I can live two months on one good compliment.

—Mark Twain

2. People tend to do what they get noticed for. If we can’t get attention for doing the positive, many of us will succumb to doing the negative.

As a teacher, it was so easy for me to forget to compliment the students who were either consistently well-behaved or frequently misbehaving. Then I came across a helpful way to solve this problem. I made a stack of cards and on each card wrote a child’s name. When a student’s name was on top, I took a minute to compliment that student and then put that card on the bottom of the stack. If there was a child who needed extra encouragement, I made more cards with that student’s name.

Think about the kind of behavior you’d like to encourage in students, family members, co-workers, clerks, neighbors, and friends. Then when you see that behavior, recognize it with a compliment. There’s a good chance that positive behavior will be repeated.

3. We become better ourselves when we compliment others. We grow when we recognize the goodness in others. I’ve noticed that people who compliment a certain characteristic in another person seem to have that quality or characteristic themselves. Gracious people are usually aware of gracious people, and honest people are typically aware of honest people.

Words are powerful. Unfortunately, negative words are even more powerful than positive words. Yet what

bombards us in many homes, school hallways, and office buildings? Put-downs, criticisms, sarcastic remarks, and degrading humor.

There is, however, good news: Complimenting is a skill that can be learned. We can get better at complimenting by learning to “scan for red.” Try walking into a room and scanning the room for red. You will be amazed at the red objects that you hadn’t previously noticed! The same idea will work if we start to look for things to compliment: All kinds of things will start jumping out at us.

A compliment doesn’t have to be long to have an impact. In fact, shorter is often better. There are three things we can do to make a compliment powerful:

□ **Say the person’s name and pronounce it correctly.** (Be sure to spell it correctly if writing the compliment.) Most people enjoy hearing the sound of their name, so remembering to say the person’s name makes the compliment more personal.

□ **Be specific.** Rather than tell someone she gave a good speech, mention some part of the speech or delivery that was particularly impressive or meaningful.

□ **Compliment the unusual.** If a young man is a great football player and everyone knows it, compliment something else about him, such as his quick wit.

A Compliment Challenge

- Set a goal of giving 5 compliments a day.
- To remind yourself, put 5 pennies in a pocket. Each time you compliment, transfer a penny to another pocket.
- Watch for the results.

Adapted from Touch a Heart with a Compliment, available from the author: Barbara McCauley-Lovejoy, Unlimited Horizons, 854 Elm Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah 84106; Phone: (801) 466-1117; E-Mail: horizons@utah.uswest.net.

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