

# SmartBlog on Leadership

Engage. Innovate. Discuss.

## Leading with an attitude of gratitude

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on June 18th, 2012

One of my executive-coaching clients recently shared something that bears repeating. Years ago, when he was a bank officer in training, a senior vice president walked up to him and said, “I know we don’t get to talk much, but I wanted to thank you for bringing such a creative spirit to the workplace. It’s important to shake things up a bit.”

Until then, my client had been worrying about whether he was going too far, whether he was making suggestions and trying things that made his colleagues uncomfortable. But that bank executive’s expression of gratitude washed away his doubt and set him up for a successful career of innovation and thought leadership.

Expressing gratitude is really the art of noticing — noticing what others do and how it affects you. Yes, our co-workers sometimes cause problems, but the vast majority of what our colleagues do helps us and helps the company. By putting more emphasis on leading with an attitude of gratitude, we can build confidence in others, improve productivity, foster innovation and develop positive relationships at work. Here are five tips for leading through gratitude.

1. **Combine gratitude and feedback.** Providing employees with frequent, specific feedback is a critical teaching and management tool. Prefacing feedback with “I want to thank you for ...” is even more powerful and builds trust and camaraderie.
2. **Be specific and authentic.** For gratitude to be believable — and effective — it needs to be true. Effective leaders take time to notice the many ways in which employees make sacrifices and contribute to the team. Then, they offer specific thanks. “Thank you for staying late every night this week and making our Friday deadline,” not “Thanks for working hard.”
3. **Make gratitude intentional and routine.** Some managers are so focused on gratitude that they keep a daily log. Even if it’s not every day, take time regularly to reflect on each team member, list the person’s finest qualities and achievements, and make a note of how that person has positively affected you.
4. **Make gratitude either intimate or public (but not casual).** If you’re taking time to notice the good work your team is doing, don’t waste that effort with a casual “thank you.” Depending on the situation, either sit down and express your gratitude during a calm, private moment or make your “thank you” a moment of public acknowledge in front of your team.
5. **Don’t forget about notes — handwritten, please.** While e-mails and texts might be convenient, most are easily brushed aside. But the occasional handwritten note can make a big and lasting impression on employees and superiors.

There’s nothing wrong with pointing out areas in which people can improve — that’s another important part of leadership — but almost everyone prefers managers who lead from a position of gratitude. After all, who likes to have their faults highlighted and strengths ignored?

*Joel Garfinkle is author of “[Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#),” which Fortune magazine writer Anne Fisher called “a must-read for anyone looking to turbocharge his or her career.” Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 executive coaches in America and has written seven books and more than 300 articles on leadership. He has been featured on ABC News and National Public Radio as well as in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Newsweek, Bloomberg Businessweek, Forbes and USA TODAY. You can learn more about his [executive coaching](#) and more than [300 FREE articles](#).*