

## Book Review by Gary Jones

Title: “The Power of Appreciation in Business: How an Obsession with Value Increases Performance, Productivity and Profits”

Author: Noelle C. Nelson

Publisher: MindLab Publishing

Length: 176 pages

Price: \$24.95

Reading time: 3-4 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 – very difficult; 10 – very easy)

Overall rating: 2 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

The basic premise of “The Power of Appreciation” by Noelle Nelson is captured by the title—that is, a little employee appreciation can go a long way toward increasing employee job satisfaction, improving retention, and increasing productivity.

As have many observers before her, Nelson acknowledges that it is easier to criticize than to praise. It is a fairly well-worn mantra that if you are a supervisor, or employee supervision is a part of your professional work life, it is worthwhile to take a little time to express appreciation to subordinates for tasks done well.

What helps to set this book apart—and make it worth the read—is the author’s experience in the field, and the many workplace examples she incorporates to support her position. Nelson, who has advanced degrees in clinical psychology, has worked both as a judicial trial consultant and as a clinical psychologist, and has written several popular books concerning employee appreciation.

Nelson has particularly close connections with Southwest Airlines and See’s Candies, and examples from those companies (among others) populate the book. In the section on appreciation [and use] of employee ideas, for example, Nelson cites instances where employees suggestions improved aircraft turnaround times, in one case, and, more recently, helped optimize aircraft scheduling. The latter suggestion, backed by programming expertise, is “expected to bring Southwest tens of millions of dollars of added revenue.” The employee’s reward was not mentioned, but it should be safe to assume it was substantial.

Although the book is rich with examples and does offer some supporting empirical evidence for its claims, the common-sense underpinning of the text serves as both a strength and a weakness. A weakness because the reader will not learn much that is new. The table of contents reads like a list of tiresome platitudes: “It All Starts With You,” “Employees: The Great Divide,” “Managers: Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” and “Customers: The Necessary Evil?”

Fortunately, beyond the strength of her illustrative examples, Nelson’s enthusiastic writing and occasional citation of empirical data at least partially redeem the book. The author cites survey data that suggest an improved corporate return on equity and an improved return on

assets in firms where employees give the company high marks on the recognition of excellence. The source of these data is not particularly persuasive, but at least the author recognizes her responsibility here and makes the attempt.

The worst aspect of the book occurs in places where the author stretches too far and the writing takes on a pop culture, almost new age, quality. This is particularly true when she delves into a description of “your heart’s electromagnetic field” and comparative differences in brain scan imagery between mood states of “appreciation” and “negativity.” Blood flow to the brain may indeed be richer in the former, but the author’s evidence for this is especially weak.

More generally, a weakness of this book is the lack of quality references regarding what is known about the relationship between demonstrated management appreciation of employees and measures of employee satisfaction. And the lack of an index, missing here, is an annoying drawback of any book.

Nevertheless, with the above qualifications, I would recommend this book, if only for how well it serves to remind us of the importance of a simple, sincere, “thank you.”

Gary H. Jones is an assistant professor of business communication in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. He worked in both the public and private sector in Los Angeles and earned a Ph.D. in Communication Theory and Research at the University of Southern California. For previously reviewed books visit our Web site at [www.wcu.edu/cob/](http://www.wcu.edu/cob/).