

Key Differentiation 34

“Appreciation” versus “Approval”

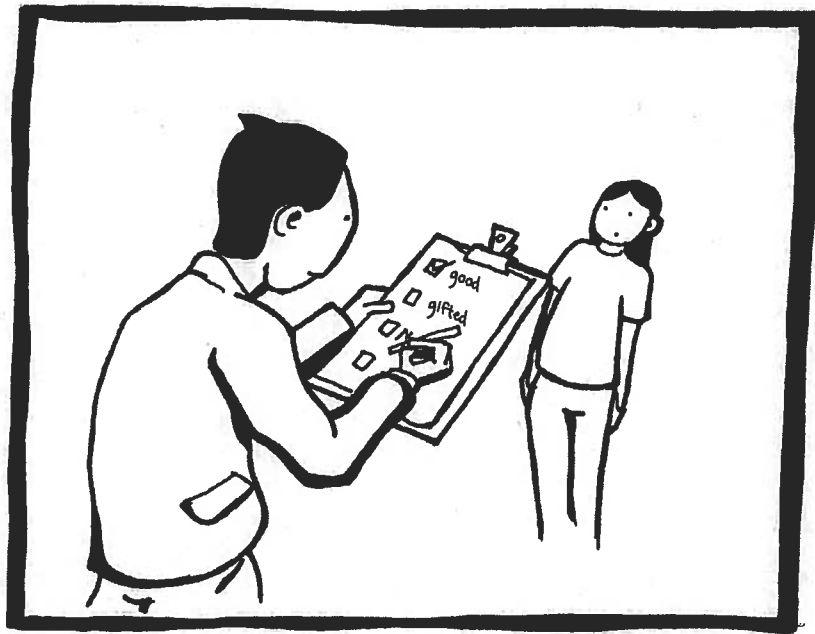
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To express **appreciation** is a way to celebrate and tell someone that something he or she said or did not say, met our needs. Appreciations - as the word is used in NVC - consists of an observation, a pleasant feeling, and a need that has been met. Appreciations are often nourishing for the recipient as well as for the sender.

Approval, praise and compliments are kinds of rewards based on the concept of “right and wrong”, “normal” and “abnormal”. Those rewards contain judgments and may establish an - often devastating - addiction to approval from others, thereby sometimes contributing to people disregarding their own needs in favor of the needs of others.

One important difference between appreciation and approval lies in the intent. When we give appreciation our intention is to celebrate needs met, to share the joy we feel with the people who made the difference. We tell others what actions of theirs made our life more wonderful.

The intention of giving compliments and praise may be to “make” the other person repeat something that pleased us, and or to make them act, in a special way, to be loved and approved by us. We judge whether they are good, normal, smart or perfect; we describe



what they “are”. The praise and approval is based on our perception of “right” and “wrong” and we grant ourselves the liberty to act as judges. Even when the judgment is “positive”, it is still a judgment based on the concept of “right and wrong”.

Reflection

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Many people seem to have taken it on themselves to help others build self-confidence by telling them that they are clever, beautiful, gifted or amiable.

To hear this type of judgment from others poses a risk that – instead of feeling acceptance, love or respect for oneself – one gets more and more dependent upon the approval of others in order to feel good. One perhaps even starts putting on pressure to always match up to the judgments, demanding from oneself to always be “smart”, “nice” or “intelligent”, demands that easily become overwhelming and may lead to self-contempt.

I have been involved with people who have given me lots of compliments. I understand now that they praised my ability to do this or that, as a strategy to make me do more and to do it even better next time. And I did just that, as a strategy to be seen, to experience fellowship or to be loved.

“You are so good at doing this. Will you please come tomorrow night and help me fix it?”

Month after month, year after year. Until the judgments were not even positive anymore, they were more like:

“Weren’t you supposed to have fixed this yesterday, I thought we had agreed that this is your responsibility. And now you haven’t done it, you just ignored it. I can’t trust you anymore.”

So, what was initially meant as an appreciation – although in the form of a judgment – changed into demands and damaged relationships.

I think about what a difference it would have made had the appreciation been given to me as the joyful feelings and needs my

actions could contribute to – or already had contributed to – if the person had said something like:

“I just want to tell you how wonderful it is that you know how to wallpaper a room. I saw the wallpapering you did at Peter’s place and thought it would be nice to make some changes in my house with my birthday at hand. The mere thought of engaging someone I’m not acquainted with makes me miserable. The planning is much more convenient if the two of us can do it together, so I wonder if you are willing to come and help me paper one of the walls in my dining room.”

This could be an attempt to manipulate me by soft soaping me. I can’t be quite sure of the intention until I see how the other person reacts if I say “no” to their request. Even if the other person mentions both feelings and needs there is no guarantee that it is an honest appreciation. I can try to find out whether it is or not, by simply saying:

“So, I hear that it would really be helpful for you if I came to your place and helped wallpaper your dining room before your birthday, and I hear you say that you appreciated the work I did at Peter’s place. This month and next I’m very busy and have other things I want to do. How is it for you to hear me say that?”

“It’s absolutely OK, I just wanted you to know that I liked what you did at Peter’s place, and I will celebrate my birthday again next year, so perhaps I’ll ask you again later.”

If that’s the answer, I feel safe that the appreciation was sincere and I can celebrate that I can contribute to others when I choose to.