NAME THE WINS, CLOSE THE GAPS

How to turn what you saw into recognition people feel and change that holds



- **Only 23% of employees strongly agree they get the right amount of recognition for the work they do, and those who do are four times more likely to be engaged.**
- **Only 37% strongly agree they had opportunities to learn and grow at work this past year, down from 48% in 2020.**
- **Fewer than half strongly agree their manager holds them accountable for their performance goals, and those who do are about 2.5 times more likely to be engaged.**

Gallup, A Great Manager's Most Important Habit, 2024; Gallup, U.S. Employee Engagement Declines From 2020 Peak, 2026; Gallup, Re-Engineering Performance Management, 2023

"Nice work" and "do better" are not development

There is almost always something worth celebrating if you're observing regularly. Most managers walk right past it on the way to what went wrong. Then they say some version of "do it right next time" and consider the job done. Both halves matter. Recognition is not a nicety; it is what makes the next hard conversation land. And telling someone to improve is not the same as building the plan that lets them. The plan depends on why a gap exists. If the person cannot yet do the task, that is a skill gap, and the answer is teaching. If they can do it but are not, that is a will gap, and the answer is clarity and accountability. Confuse the two, and you coach in the wrong direction and destroy trust.

Three in-the-moment signs you are skipping a step

- People mostly hear from you when something goes wrong.
- You leave feedback conversations and realize you don't know what to do next.
- You are coaching repeatedly on the same issues.

Adjust your approach – celebrate and enhance in five questions

1. **What went well?** Say it out loud and be specific. There is almost always something to celebrate.
2. **Is this a skill gap or a will gap?** Are they unable to do it yet, or can they do it and are not? Everything else depends on this answer.
3. **If it is skill, what will you teach?** Name the practice or coaching that builds the ability and set them up for success.
4. **If it is will, what is the real obstacle?** Unclear priority, competing demand, or no consequence. Name it before you push.
5. **What is the plan, and when do we review it?** One action, owned by them, with a timeline.

Celebrate, then enhance.

Recognition and enhancement are not opposites. Name the wins and identify the gap, if there is one. Build the plan that improves behavior or builds on the success. The results compound when you pair this with aligned expectations and consistent observation. Master this cycle and performance will grow exponentially.

Want help building this into your business? Let's talk.

Want to dip your toes in first? Join The Joyful Leadership Lab, a free monthly discussion group.

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