

2-MINUTE TIP: NEW APPROACH TO GIVING PRAISE

STRENGTH-BASED PRAISE BUILDS SKILLS

Criticism fails, So name the skill or behavior to increase

For years, I have trained my supervisees in a **Strength-Based** method to "name the skill." Don't just say "Good job" or other generic praise. I say, "Name the skill and when you reinforce a behavior, name the specific behavior."

- Say, "Billy, showed you can keep your hands to yourself, good self-control." "Alice and Joe, you stopped yourselves from arguing, which is excellent self-restraint." "Carolyn, despite anxiety, you performed the steps we agreed upon and went to the market, so you can give yourself a big pat on the back for being bold." "You went from drinking daily to only having two drinking days in 3 months, that's 96.7% improvement - during which you showed strength, took advantage of your support system and meetings, and changed your attitude from valuing alcohol to ruling it out of your life. Your brain thanks you. Your family thanks you. You can thank yourself for doing so well." "Despite being scared, you actually drove past the intersection you had avoided after your car collision, so now you can say 'I'm bold and I don't let things stop me.'" "You may criticize yourself, nonetheless, you showed real character and kindness toward your friend." "Good stopping and thinking, planing what to do, getting control over impulsiveness." "Thank you for your honesty [trust, courage] sharing that with me." I tell my trainees to model this skill-praising strategy in family sessions, namely, find opportunities to note child's skills and to note positive skills parents are showing. "Jill and Jeff, you took a moment to not criticize or quarrel, and rather you complimented your partner for what you received that you wanted and hoped for!"

When receiving praise or positive reinforcement for a) characteristics or positive traits we may not have realized we showed or b) new positive, functional behaviors, **most of us feel a positive charge to our self-worth, with a jolt of well-being**. It makes us want to live up to that praise again. That's intrinsic motivation, wanting to do something to make ourselves feel good. Skill-naming shows just what's expected to continue. Criticism fails to do that. Lastly, this approach improves your relationship.

So, I just learned my approach has a name, **Descriptive Praise or Behavior-Specific Praise**. It's a positive reinforcement strategy that tells someone exactly which desired behavior they performed. Instead of a general "good job," it provides specific feedback, like "Thank you for raising your hand and having patience to wait to be called on."

Key components of behavior-specific praise

Positive statement: The praise should be a positive, genuine statement of delivered with enthusiasm.

Specific behavior: Describe the observable behavior. But I add **name the skill** – naming a category of behaviors seems wiser, so the person can perform an array of related behaviors. So, name the category of the behavior, the skill behind it, or the trait being demonstrated.

By the way, "You have shown curiosity and patience to read and learn from this summary. Try it yourself and compliment your openness to experience and cleverness – pat on the back for you."

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