

Celebrate small wins to boost performance

In a 1968 issue of Harvard Business Review, Frederick Herzberg published a now-classic article titled *One more time: How do you motivate employees?* His message was that: People are most satisfied with their jobs (and therefore most motivated) when those jobs give them the opportunity to experience achievement.

In order to investigate this message in the modern context, Amabile and Kramer conducted a multi-year research project. Their aim was to uncover what makes people happy, motivated, creative and productive at work. To do this, they asked 238 people, from 7 organisations, to send them a diary at the end of each workday. The diary form requested that the participants provided ratings on a number of items, including their mood, motivation, productivity, and creativity that day. But the most important item asked them to describe one event that stood out in their mind from that day. In the end, the researchers had nearly 12,000 of these dairies.

The findings were extremely interesting. Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making consistent and meaningful progress. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run. Findings showed that it did not matter what was trying to be achieved or solved, everyday progress, even a small win, can make all the difference in how they feel and perform. This is known as the progress principle. Capturing small wins every day enhanced a worker's motivation.

Canadian based educator and motivational speaker Merhnaz Bassiri summarised small wins well by saying, “Small wins have a transformational power. Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion to favour another small win and another small win until the combination of these small wins lead to larger and greater accomplishments.”

Simply recording progress in some way helped to boost self-confidence toward future successes. There is neuroscience behind this thought process too. When one accomplishes something, it activates the reward centre of our brains, allowing us to feel a sense of pride. Specifically, the neurochemical dopamine is released and energises us with feel-good emotions. This chemical helps you to experience the feeling of getting rewarded and can hook you on wanting to achieve even more.

Our [next article](#) will explore the implications of this research on managerial behaviour, and how to leverage the power of small wins.

References

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