

An Illuminating Message

Having arrived in LA after a 10 and a half hour flight the senses and other parts of the body tend to be numb. But the stress of driving on a freeway system that constantly looks like spaghetti junction does not exactly make you attuned to sensationally simple motivational schemes.

However on the freeway (Motorway) which takes you from the airport through the suburbs of L.A., a road of four lanes each way full of slow moving traffic, gave me a glimpse of what makes Americans so good at selling. On the side of the road there was a large sign, one of those illuminated boards that flashes a two line message. It was large, in fact it was very large, painted in blue and white with a Ford logo hanging beneath it. It was however the message that was most intriguing, remember that there are hundreds of thousands of vehicles passing this sign every single day. You would think the message displayed on the sign would be about their latest offers, the launch of a new model perhaps, a fabulous finance deal or even a UK style message with their opening times. But not this one, it had a two part message part one, said "Sales Man of the Month" and as you drove nearer the sign part two flashed on with the name of that months top performing sales person. There it was a sales man with his name in lights, I can remember that in my days selling for large organisations I would have killed to have had my name in lights!

The point of this simple story is to remind us that the key to motivation is to praise in public reprimand in private. All too often however we get this the wrong way round with managers and business owners taking delight in telling somebody off to an audience but then secretly taking them to a corner to tell them they have done quite well. Praising in public is not something that most small or even medium sized businesses find easy to do. After all we've not all got huge signs outside our offices or factories in which we can illuminate good employees names but I'm sure if you put your mind to it, there is a way in which you could achieve similar results. For those of you who are in small partnerships, it might be two or three of you, when did you last make the effort to genuinely and sincerely praise or congratulate your colleague.

So the message from America is simply this, find a way to compliment or praise those people who you work closely with and those who work for you. It's also amazing how a few kind words to a supplier can dramatically improve their performance and patience with you.