

Blazing a T.R.A.I.L. To Success



The New Art & Science of Acknowledgment



A step-by-step guide for redefining your business,
relationships and life

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Why Acknowledgment Can't Be Left to Chance

The most common misconception regarding acknowledgment is that it is something that only needs doing on special occasions, such as when someone has done something remarkable or appears outstanding in some way. In reality, this is a little like imagining that we only need to steer our car to avoid hitting things. In fact, acknowledgment is a lot like driving in that we generally have somewhere we want our relationships to go and some idea of how long it will take to get there.

Acknowledgment gives people direction. It guides and motivates them. Without acknowledgment behavior tends to drift in unplanned, random, and often undesirable directions. Just as if we had to let go of the steering wheel on our car, we wouldn't be surprised if that had some unpleasant results. But we are so often perplexed when people

behave in some way we wish they hadn't. When that happens, look back and recall when the last clear acknowledgment was provided and the results will probably appear much less surprising.

To continue the driving analogy, in order to get anywhere the first thing we have to know is where we are right now. The same is true for acknowledgment. We have a simple assessment tool (page 67) that will help you identify your acknowledgment status in as many of your current relationships as you choose to evaluate. What do you really know about where you are right now with the person you will be acknowledging? As in driving, if you are not where you think you are when you get started, it will inevitably take a lot longer to get where you want to go.

Where driving and acknowledgment are not particularly similar is in the fact that most of us were taught to drive. We had driving lessons, learned the rules of the road, practiced, and we took a test to prove we were sufficiently prepared to drive safely on our own. However, for the most part, none of us ever received deliberate lessons in acknowledgment. Generally, the closest we get are some communication rules of etiquette such as being told to say "please" and "thank you" and even those basic civilities are neither taught nor practiced as widely as they once were.

Imagine if no one on the road had ever taken a driving lesson, learned any rules or if there were no street signs, traffic signals, or lines down the center of the road; there would probably be far more accidents and it would inevitably be necessary to adopt some form of order and general rules of behavior.

In relationships, acknowledgment is not just what keeps us out of emotional collisions it is what shows us when and where we can and cannot go. One of the things you can look forward to if you choose to master the five languages of Acknowledgment is the sense of freedom and satisfaction you probably had when you got your drivers license or your first car. It will be an even more profound liberation when you begin delivering (and receiving) more effective acknowledgments. Initially there may be some of that same anxiousness or nervousness that you had when you were first learning to drive. Even if you have an occasional acknowledgment-fender-bender, it is unlikely there will be any permanent damage. You won't get a ticket and you won't have to file an insurance claim. Just keep practicing and you will be amazed at how quickly your skills will develop.

One more way that acknowledgment is different than driving is that while one or two good drivers cannot appreciably change the flow of traffic or the skills of the drivers around them; just one person fluent in and practicing even one language of acknowledgment can change an entire organization, family or community.

The reason for this is quite simple and interesting while the reward for good driving is mostly avoiding negative consequences (i.e. accidents, higher insurance, tickets), it also tends to make you more aware of and aggravated by bad drivers. On the other hand, becoming fluent in acknowledgment provides consistent and considerable positive reinforcement. The satisfaction and delight you will be generating for so many people is extremely gratifying in itself, the really surprising and terrific

There are not many courses in Acknowledgment 101!

Acknowledgment is satisfying for everyone involved.

thing, however is that rather than making us conscious of how bad everyone around us is at acknowledgment, you will become aware of how much you have received but never noticed before.

Relationships

Growing a relationship is a lot like growing anything else, but in place of air and water and sunshine you use the five languages of Acknowledgment (Trust, Respect, Appreciation, Interest, and Listening). Those are the things that nourish a relationship, thereby strengthening and expanding it.

A lot of people assume that time is all it takes to grow and deepen a relationship. All time does is lengthen a relationship. You might assert that staying in a relationship for a long period of time is a form of acknowledgment in and of itself. We would suggest that this is confusing acknowledgment with endurance. Unless some overt and deliberate acknowledgment is provided over time, the relationship is more one of geographical proximity than human intimacy.

Don't confuse
acknowledgment
and endurance.

Staying in touch, even being in regular or frequent communication cannot automatically be construed as being related. Computers exchange information quite effectively and regularly but almost no one would assert that they are related in any social or certainly any human sense.

Exchanging or sharing information or ideas is exactly that, no more or no less. When information is shared inside a context of any of the five Acknowledgment languages, it attains a much greater power and adds to the possibility of an even greater relationship.

**Acknowledgment is NOT saying
something to make people feel
good**



But it IS the key to relationships