One of the most common concerns workers have is not knowing if their contributions are valued. Many employees work diligently to perform their work, but receive little feedback on how they are doing. Some don’t think about it much until they attend a meeting or receive an internal memo highlighting others who have achieved something noteworthy. Then they wonder if management knows what they do. What was intended by management to be praise for some turns into a concern for others.

One obvious cure for employee feelings of neglect is more frequent management feedback. Management attention given properly makes employees feel supported and valued. It gives employees assurance they have an advocate. But the responsibility isn’t just on managers. Employees have a responsibility too.

There are several measures employees can take to ensure their contributions are recognized, but first employees need to be realistic. No manager has the bandwidth to know everything their employees do. I had an employee once who journaled most everything he did every week and sent it to me in a multi-page email every Friday. That was too much information. Nor do employees want their manager to know everything anyway. That is called micromanagement which is one of the other most common complaints employees have about their managers. Employees want freedom and flexibility to get their work done without constant oversight.

So what do employees want? Most want their contributions recognized, but without excessive inspection. They don’t want their managers questioning how they do, when they do, or where they do something. They want their managers to know they’ve given a solid effort and when they’ve made a noteworthy contribution. As an example, consider a sales person who has a goal to develop a new client. The work to be done might include research, brainstorming, requesting referrals, attending conferences, making calls, and securing an initial meeting. This first meeting would be a noteworthy milestone for most sales people and deserving of management’s attention. However, all the preparation might not be. Following this first client meeting, most managers would expect an update, but not all the details. They would want periodic updates until an outcome is reached, such as a successful sale.

One of the primary issues preventing recognition is when managers and employees wait until a desired outcome is reached to catch up. That cheats them both. The manager doesn’t know about or appreciate the incremental steps leading up to the achievement. The employee misses the chance to keep the manager informed and aware of the contributions made.

What is the right balance of doing value adding work and communicating it? What might employees do to ensure their incremental contributions are recognized along the journey? Here are five practices that help:
• **Ensure value** – Being busy doesn’t equal adding value. First in importance to receiving recognition is doing work that deserves it. Focus your energy on value-adding priorities. Limit distractions, especially those that don’t contribute directly to the goals of the organization. If you work in a small business, what adds value is obvious. In a large organization, it might not be so obvious, but no less important. Value adding work is activity that creates value beyond its cost by an agreed-upon return-on-investment.

• **Align** – There are many ways to accomplish most goals. This is good news in terms of having flexibility and opportunities to differentiate yourself. However, doing work in ways that isn’t aligned to your boss’s wishes or organization’s best practices can be bad news. You might work diligently, but if your methods are not aligned with your boss’s, your work might not be appreciated. Ensure your work is valued by aligning with your boss and other key stakeholders. Discuss and agree on your approach, deliverables, timeframe, roles, responsibilities, and desired outcomes.

• **Take action** – People who get things done are easy to recognize. They are action oriented. They are proactive, intentional, and productive. They are decisive and move quickly. If you want to be recognized, get going. Get the right people involved, gain buy in, reach alignment, and make a positive difference. Solve the problem, leverage the opportunity, or execute the project. Think several steps ahead. Anticipate what people need in terms of information, resources, and assistance. Be responsive to requests. Let people see that you are doing everything needed.

• **Provide updates** – Keep people informed, but not too informed. Long emails don’t get read. Neither do Powerpoint documents. Know who should be updated as well as how and when. Most stakeholders want an update as work progresses or when an obstacle arises. If receiving an update to a large document, they appreciate when changes are highlighted so they don’t have to re-read the entire document. Provide concise bullets and make them clear. Start them with verbs so the activity you are communicating doesn’t create more questions than answers. For example, a bullet with “Proposal” isn’t very clear. “Deliver proposal on Monday” is.

• **Give credit** – Perhaps the best way to make your contribution known is to highlight what others do on your team. If you are leading a project team, communicate what others are doing as part of your activity. Those on your team will appreciate it and likely return the favor. You’ll also be recognized for leading the team. Leave out the “I”s. Use the pronouns “we” or “they”. Don’t give people credit where credit isn’t due, but give credit where it is. Be as specific as possible and as detailed as appropriate.
