

Brand You: Thank You Notes

I once wrote a cover story for *Success* magazine, and it was “Rules for Implementation.” And as I recall, there were about 30 rules. Well, every list of 30, by definition, has got something that comes in first. And the one that I chose for first place is one that I would choose for first place all these years later. And it was: Don’t forget your thank you notes.

Thank you is recognition of a job well done. Moreover—and I could go on for two hours instead of two minutes—the most important person to send thank you notes to is not the vice president you called on, but the vice president’s secretary who was able to get you a meeting with the vice president.

I had a guy I worked for years and years ago in the White House, and he sequestered himself in his office at the end of the evening around 6:30, 7 or 7:30, and literally wrote 15 or 20 thank you notes per evening. And, again, as I said, it wasn’t to the Congressman, but it was to the Congressman’s junior aide who had gotten him a meeting with the Congressman.

Well, many, many years ago, the great American psychologist, William James, famously said—and listen up, please— “The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated.” And if anybody’s ever said anything that was correct, I think that’s it.

I told these kinds of stories for a while and I had a guy who attended a seminar. He was a vice president, just retired, at the 3M Corporation. And he came to a subsequent seminar and he said, “Boy,” he said, “if you need proof, Tom, I’m your proof.” He said, “I went to a retirement party and,” he said, “I remember this one guy who came up to me and he almost had tears in his eyes” —and this fellow was an understater, not an overstater, so it was probably true— “that he almost had tears in his eyes and he thanked me for a thank you note that I had sent him 10 years before, that he still had posted on the wall of his cubicle.”

You say that may be an exaggeration. I say if you think it’s an exaggeration, you’re really blowing it. I made a list of how to get things done. I put thank you notes at the top of the list. If I were making a list today, I’d put thank you notes at the top of the list. Recognition, appreciation, *nothing* gets you further—and it also makes you a better human being.

