Did You Forget to Say Something?

As I write, we are approaching the end of the exam period, and my access services team is tired. It has been a long three weeks of staffing our circulation desk from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. while being down one full-time team member. Add in the long and seemingly endless Indiana winter and the fact that they will almost certainly have a third consecutive year without raises while facing significant increases in parking and other fees, and I am lucky that they can still muster smiles and provide outstanding customer service to our faculty and students.

Daniel H. Pink, author of Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us, writes that what inspires and motivates professionals to come to work every day and do good work is less about money than other intangibles. He encourages organizations to pay salaries that “take the money issue off the table” and allow employees to focus on the work. He further advocates that the true motivators are autonomy, mastery, and purpose. If you don’t have time to read the 215-page book and discussion guide, you can watch a four-minute speedy white board sketch at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui6XAPnuFJc.

The current situation in law libraries demands that we be innovative in how we motivate our colleagues to excel in their work. We live in a time when budget reductions co-exist with new service demands and opportunities. These circumstances mean that we cannot add new people, but we have to develop strategies to find, encourage, and develop capabilities among our existing staff. If ever there was a time to re-evaluate the “carrot and stick” theory of motivation, it is now.

Although not given great prominence in Pink’s work, I think there might be an equally important motivator that frequently is forgotten. As administrators and managers, we plan two and three projects ahead. As one project concludes, we are so glad it is finished that we often forget to say “thank you” to the people who made it happen. Gratitude is important, even though we may forget to express it sometimes.

I have heard many reasons for why we don’t always express our gratitude for work well done. Some of us have a difficult time accepting compliments and so find it also difficult to convey them. Some of us have a difficult time accepting gratitude for work well done. Some of us have a difficult time accepting compliments and so find it also difficult to convey them. Some of us have a difficult time accepting gratitude for work well done. Some of us have a difficult time accepting compliments and so find it also difficult to convey them. Some of us believe that thanking someone for doing his or her job is an odd concept. Maybe we don’t specifically focus on all the added work that was involved in bringing a particular project to a successful conclusion because we are already thinking two projects ahead. Or perhaps you meant to say “thank you” but just didn’t get around to it. I know I have been guilty of all of these excuses at some point or another.

American author Kurt Vonnegut urged us in his work A Man without a Country to “Please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, ‘If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.’” Similarly, we need to live a little more fully in the moment in our work settings. We should find ways to reflect on and enjoy the satisfaction of work well done before rushing off to another pressing matter. And in that moment, we should remember to say, “Thanks. Good job!” Doing so will undoubtedly make someone’s day a little better and happier.