

By Ruth Ostrow

Prince Charles has been carrying on recently about not feeling appreciated. In his first US television interview in 10 years, the heir to the British throne said it was hard to remain relevant and he feared his views were being too easily dismissed.

I felt the same this morning as I dragged myself out of bed and, with eyes closed, cut the lunch sandwiches, cleaned up a glass my daughter had broken on the bathroom floor and cleaned up cat poo that had fallen out of the kitty-litter tray - only to be yelled at for not buying fruit juice.

Lots of people feel unappreciated. It's no secret that Peter Costello is feeling a tad undervalued at the moment. And many of the women and men who used to call my sex and relationships radio program felt unappreciated: "He never buys me flowers any more!" (Isn't there a song about that?) "I work hard out of bed, I work hard in bed, but she just criticises or lies there like a fallen tree."

The thing about appreciation is that it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. When treated poorly, unacknowledged and unpraised, people will fall under the wheels of their own self-pity and resentment, and perform to the lowest expectation. Studies have shown that a bit of praise can do wonders for productivity.

According to one human resources manager I interviewed last year, since his company introduced a corporate well-being program aimed at rewarding and nurturing staff, sick days had decreased by 25 per cent and resignations were well down - saving the company hundreds of thousands of dollars.

As Christmas approaches, it's time for an orgy of appreciation. There's no gift or Chrissie party that will make an employee happier than a personal note or phone call full of honouring and praise; no present from a partner that can replace the gushing card acknowledging deeds done through the year. When coupled with that long-promised massage, it can move fallen trees.

Johnny Howard can send Peter a heartfelt note as his hard-working lieutenant forges new tax reforms; maybe he could include a nice, firm back (if not ego) rub and a bag of sweets. As for Charles, it's hard to know what would help him unless Mummy gives him the throne. Ahh, yes, a crown, a velvet robe and an orb handed to me as I leave the kitchen carrying the poo shovel, family grovelling at my feet. Now that's my idea of validation!

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