IT SUMMIT

One Team: Powering Technology Together

University of Arizona
Student Union Memorial Center Ballroom

Speaking the Same Language

How Appreciation Styles Shape IT Team Culture

Jessica Jones – Senior Talent Development Specialist; Human Resources

OPENING SCENARIO

Your team just shipped a major update.

Your manager wants to recognize the work. Which would mean the most to you?

A

A shout-out in the all-hands/team meeting

B

Your manager carves out time to debrief just with you & hear your thoughts on the experience

C

A teammate jumps in to help you during the next crunch

D

A handwritten note — or a gift card to your favorite coffee spot

The appreciation gap quietly erodes collaboration.

79%

of employees who quit cite lack of appreciation as a key factor

2.9×

as likely to be engaged— employees who are receiving some form of recognition/appreciation

50%

how much average U.S. team size has grown since 2013

Most of this isn't because people don't care.

It's because they're appreciating others the way THEY want to be appreciated, not the way their colleagues actually need.

Data from Appreciation at Work website and Gallup reports

The Five Languages of Appreciation

Chapman & White (2019) — adapted for the workplace from Gary Chapman's original framework

01	**Words of Affirmation**	*Verbal or written recognition*
02	**Quality Time**	*Focused, undivided attention*
03	**Acts of Service**	*Helping through action*
04	**Tangible Gifts**	*Thoughtful tokens of appreciation*
05	**Physical Touch**	*High-fives, handshakes, fist-bumps*

01 Words of Affirmation

These folks need to hear it. Specifically, sincerely, and in writing or out loud.

What it looks like:

- Verbal praise in team meetings
- Specific written feedback (not just 'good job')
- Public recognition in Teams, email, or newsletters
- A personal thank-you note or message
- **Virtual/Hybrid Teams**: physical mail, sharing funny memes, intentional praise in public

Examples:

A developer fixes a tricky production bug at 2am. You send a message the next morning: 'That fix saved us! I want you to know I noticed and I'm grateful.'

During a sprint retro, you call out someone by name: 'The migration went smoothly because of the prep work Jordan put in. Let's take a moment to recognize that.'

After a rough ticket queue week, you post in Teams: 'The service desk team handled over 300 tickets this week with a 96% satisfaction rate. That's remarkable.'

⚠ *Watch out: Generic praise ('great job!') lands flat for this group. Specificity is the signal that you actually noticed.*

02

Quality Time

These folks feel valued when you give them your full, undivided attention.

What it looks like:

- 1:1s where you're truly present (not multitasking)
- Post-project debrief just the two of you
- Walking the person through a problem together
- Coffee or lunch to celebrate a win
- **Virtual/Hybrid Teams**: personal catch-up time, dialogue about non-work topics

Examples:

A network engineer who quietly keeps infrastructure running gets a 30-minute 1:1 from their manager with no agenda, just: 'Tell me what's been on your mind lately.' No laptop. No phone.

After a successful server migration, you debrief over coffee: 'Walk me through what you were thinking when we hit that snag. I want to understand how you solved it.'

A team lead blocks 45 minutes on a junior dev's calendar to pair through a problem together. Not to fix it for them, but to think alongside them.

⚠ *Watch out: Multi-tasking in a 1:1 is a direct hit on this person's sense of value.*

03 Acts of Service

These folks feel valued when someone steps in and actually helps without being asked twice.

What it looks like:

- Jumping in during an outage without being asked
- Taking something off their plate when they're overloaded
- Clearing roadblocks so they can focus
- Helping test, document, or review their work
- **Virtual/Hybrid Teams**: schedule meetings in their time zone, provide admin support for tasks

Examples:

A colleague notices a security analyst is buried in alerts during a high-volume week and takes two of their standard documentation tasks without being asked.

A manager shields a developer from three consecutive meeting invites so they can stay in a focus flow during a sprint deadline. 'I'll take notes and catch you up later.'

A senior engineer sits down and helps a junior teammate write test cases for a complex feature. Not because it's their job, but because they see the person is stuck.

⚠ *Watch out: This person notices who shows up in the crunch and who disappears. Presence in hard moments is the currency.*

04 Tangible Gifts

These folks feel valued when they receive a concrete, thoughtful token that says, 'I thought of you specifically.'

What it looks like:

- A gift card to a coffee shop or restaurant they love
- A book recommendation related to a topic they've mentioned wanting to explore
- Swag that feels personal, not generic
- A conference ticket or a course
- **Virtual/Hybrid Teams**: mail an item or email something unique they'll like (new recipe)

Examples:

A cloud engineer mentions offhand that they've been trying to get their AWS Solutions Architect cert. Their manager surprises them with exam voucher funding or dedicated time to study/prepare after a successful project launch.

A helpdesk supervisor works to order a mechanical keyboard for a team member who mentioned it once in passing when sharing their current one isn't working. Remembering the detail is what makes the gift land.

After an intense security incident response, the team lead sends everyone a message to end their day early on a Friday: 'You earned the time back. Thank you for all the efforts last week'

⚠ *Watch out: It's the thoughtfulness, not the cost. A $5 gift that reflects you remembered a detail matters more than a $50 generic gift card.*

Discovery Activity

What's your primary appreciation language?

Reflect on these questions (2 minutes):

1. Think of a time you felt truly appreciated at work. What happened? What was said or done?
2. What does your supervisor or teammate do that makes you feel most valued — be specific.
3. What tends to disappoint you most when it's absent: feedback, time, help, or recognition?

Then: Turn to someone near you.

Share what surfaced. What does your answer tell you about how you prefer to be shown appreciation? Does it surprise you? Does it match what you already knew?

Practical strategies you can use starting this week

In your 1:1s

- Ask: 'What's something I do (or don't do) that makes you feel valued?'
- Add appreciation language to your team norms or working-with-me doc

In project wrap-ups

- Vary how you recognize contributions. Don't default to one mode
- Match the recognition to the person, not the template

Across teams

- When collaborating cross-functionally, pay attention to how partners respond to different types of recognition
- 'Speak their language' — not yours — when showing appreciation

No-budget options

- Every language has free expressions: a Teams message, clearing a calendar conflict, helping debug, remembering a detail
- Consistency beats grand gestures

Let's Talk

What would shift on your team if people felt more consistently valued?

- Where in your work do you see the appreciation gap showing up most?
- What's one thing you wish your team knew about how you prefer to be recognized?
- How does appreciation (or its absence) affect cross-team collaboration?

One Team · One Language · One Step at a Time

The Takeaway

1. People experience appreciation differently and most of us default to our own language, not theirs.

2. The fix: ask, observe, and adapt. You don't need a program or a budget.

3. This is a team culture conversation, and it directly supports what 'One Team' means in practice.

Resources:

The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace
Chapman & White | appreciationatwork.com
LinkedIn Learning: search 'employee recognition' or 'motivating your team'

Additional Resources

Free Learning Resources Online

https://appreciationatwork.com/resources/

YouTube Channel

https://www.youtube.com/appreciationatwork

“The 5 Languages” Book

https://appreciationatwork.com/books/5-languages-of-appreciation/

IT SUMMIT

One Team: Powering Technology Together

University of Arizona
Student Union Memorial Center Ballroom

Thank You!

jessicajjones@arizona.edu – hrlearnanddevelop@arizona.edu

Jessica Jones – Senior Talent Development Specialist; Human Resources