AFFIRMATIONS *as distinct from* **PRAISE/COMPLIMENTS**

Affirmations are the most neglected communication micro-skill!

1. **Purposes of Affirmation**: (A form of reflective listening, but more deliberately affirming)
   i. Increase Hope,
   ii. Anchor person in their INTERNAL Strengths/Available Resources -You locate control and power *in the Receiver*, not in you as the affirmer.
   iii. Help mitigate demoralization – esp. in face of repeated failures/negative consequences
   iv. Increase tolerance for engaging (versus denying) info about own value-discrepant behavior.

2. **Definition: A form of Reflective Listening** Clear, genuine words of Understanding & Appreciation.
Affirmation is not a goal in itself, but a place from which to elicit more affirming information the Receiver can grab hold of; Empowers Receiver to *Self*-Affirm. Avoid delivering affirmations in ways that can be received as patronizing, or as top-down judgments (albeit a positive judgment) – overly effusive or forced attempts are experienced as lacking in genuineness, are likely to be discounted and the relationship will suffer. People are angry if you try to affirm them for breathing. (e.g."You're nice" = generic judgment; "You were so considerate of her needs and vulnerabilities when you . . . " = specific observation)

3. **Focus on Describing *Specific, Observed Behaviors*, e.g. internal attributes, qualities & values**
(Ria: what you observe directly or behaviors the Receiver describes) – *not* generic attitudes, decisions and goals (Ria: latter provide less "solid evidence" of strengths)

4. **Avoid the word "I"** "I" makes the affirmation "just" *your subjective view* based on your perceptions from the outside. Instead, locate the affirmation in the Receiver's *own experience & behavior* – the latter is harder to reject or dismiss reflexively, e.g. "You seem proud of yourself – You're beaming!"

5. **Focus on *Descriptions*, Not Evaluations** Judgments – positive or negative - are inherently alienating and disruptive of "connection." The "judger" alienates her/himself as well as the Receiver. At the very least the Judger/Praiser takes a one-up position. The antidote to Judgments: Observe and describe behavior as a video camera would, e.g. you don't say "The child threw a fit" – instead say "When Mom said 'no,' he threw his body on the ground, screamed for 5 minutes, and then calmed down." Or, "You didn't give up til you nailed that high note!"

6. **Think of Affirmations as Attributing "*Interesting Qualities*" to the Person** Helps generate genuineness; mitigates impulse to praise or sugar coat in ways that are disempowering and inauthentic. "Your unrelenting sense of adventure has had you take calculated, wise risks, reaping the benefits of a rich life."

7. **Focus on *Nonproblem* versus Problem Areas** Focus on strengths/attributes, not the *lack* of something. Find and affirm the positive; state the affirmation positively. Instead of "You managed to avoid screaming at her when she said she'd turn the kids against you if you divorced her," offer: "Given all that, you still managed to stay aligned with your values -- calm and respectful." An effective affirmation redirects the *person's focus towards their own strengths*, rather than an ineffective behavior the person avoided.

8. ***Nurture Person's Competence*, vs Deficit View of Self/World** "Unsuccessful" change experiences (e.g. failed attempts), multiple negative outcomes, negativistic and/or resistant behavior can all be reframed into an affirmation. Remember "genuine" tone, rather than impulse to sugar coat/negate the person's experience. *After* understanding what's been tried and what worked/didn't, affirm the effort, persistence, strong desire for change, what did work, willingness despite strong reservations, etc. Then the next goal is to encourage building further on the strengths/resources revealed, with "how did" and "what did" questions, e.g. "How did you keep yourself calm and respectful?" "What helped you stick to your values?" "What made it possible for you to persist despite the obstacles?"

9. **Differences between Affirmations & Praise or Compliments:** Praise endorses *dependence* and the Receiver's positive judgments, not the Receiver. The Praiser gets power from praising, rather than empowering the Receiver's *internal* locus of control and self-affirmation (e.g. "I think you're an honest person" vs. "You are someone who values honesty and lives that"). Praise rarely offers useful information about what worked/didn't work *for the person*. "Good Job, you did it!" tells a child or employee *nothing* about what they actually did that *worked for them*. In contrast the following affirmations give the recipient very clear information about what worked and why it's worth repeating: "You wanted to watch TV, and you figured out how to use watching TV as a reward to get yourself to finish your homework. Your big grin tells me you're pretty proud of yourself! You finished your homework, AND you managed to watch TV!" or "You managed to prioritize a jumble of multiple tasks and got the project in on time by identifying people's strengths, and soliciting team work in a way that left everyone knowing they had something of value to contribute.")

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