



## ***The Power of Expectations***

By Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

The expectations that you have of your employees are very powerful. Most employees will rise to your level of expectations for them. Has it ever occurred to you that your least productive employee is that way because you expect no more from them?

Unfortunately, it is easy to make this same mistake with your children. Our oldest son Bryan was tested for learning disabilities in the third grade because although he read at the right grade level, he didn't seem to comprehend what he read. While the school psychologist saw no indication of learning disabilities, he did find Bryan off task a lot and standing up when he should be sitting down. He suggested that we get Bryan tested for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

I have to admit, prior to that psychologist's statement that Jim and I had jokingly said to each other, "There is no such thing as attention deficit disorder. It's simply 'discipline deficit disorder'." You see, we have friends and relatives with ADD kids and we simply saw them as not having control over their children. I guess that shows my high control needs, right? Suddenly, we had a son who a psychologist thought may have ADD. Upon further testing Bryan, the pediatrician concurred with the psychologist and told us Bryan had a mild case of ADD.

When Bryan really began struggling both academically and socially in fifth grade, I began to realize that almost everything we said to Bryan was negative. "Bryan, can't you remember what you just studied?" - "Why did you forget this?" "How come you didn't bring your book home?" Negative, negative, negative. As a result, we contributed to Bryan's low performance by being extremely negative with him.

At the end of his fifth grade, we hired a pediatric neuropsychologist to formally assess Bryan. After 9 hours of testing, the doctor told us that Bryan had a "classic" case of Attention Deficit Disorder. He recommended medication. We opted not to medicate Bryan for two more years. We implemented numerous alternative educational interventions and health supplements. Before Bryan entered 8<sup>th</sup> grade however, we reluctantly began to use medication with Bryan. The results were dramatic and sustained. His grades didn't improve (he remained a solid B student) but his social life, sports ability, and our family life greatly improved. We could not have been more excited for Bryan yet our grade expectations for him did not dramatically change.

Then my husband Jim ran across this study about kids from different ethnic groups and how their parents' expectations impacted their grades. We decided to share the study

results with the boys at the dinner table that evening. I told the boys that Daddy came across some research and we were interested in their reaction to it. Jim told them that the research showed that, for the most part, Asian parents expect their kids to get A's, and their kids consistently get A's. Caucasian parents figure that B's are good and for the most part, their kids comply and get B's. The study found that African-American and Mexican parents pretty much expect their kids are going to get C's and D's, and their kids get C's and D's (of course we realize that there are always exceptions to these kinds of studies).

Interestingly enough in our family we have always expected Drew to get straight A's. He's gifted academically. Of course, he should easily get A's, he doesn't even have to try. So after the study overview, we turn to the boys, and said, "What do you think of that research?" Drew jumped in and said, "Yeah, that's true. I know you expect me to get A's, so I get A's." I said, "Bryan, what about you?" "Yep," he said, "pretty much I know if I get B's, you'll be happy. You'd like A's once in a while but if I get B's that's okay, so that's what I get."

I said, "Really? So Bryan, if we expected you to get A's, do you think..." "Oh, yeah, I just have to put a little more effort in." Immediately it hits him, "why did I just say that?" We jumped on that comment and said, "Guess what, Bryan? We're changing our expectations for you." We had set him up, not to fail, but also certainly not to be an excellent student -- all because of our expectations for him. Self-fulfilling expectations work with children and employees.

What do you expect from your employees – not only your top performers but your bottom-feeders as well? You may be doing the same thing to your employees as we did with Bryan and not even realize it. You expect some employees to be slackers. You believe they will never improve. You expect they are going to be low performers and you can set them up to fail simply by the nonverbal message you send. It's important to think about what are your expectations are, not only what you verbalize but, more importantly, what you believe and portray by your nonverbal expressions.

*Excerpted from Patti Hathaway's new book, **Secrets for Unleashing Employee Greatness: The Step-by-Step System to Maximize Every Employee's Greatness**, 2005. Patti Hathaway, CSP, The CHANGE AGENT, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: [www.thechangeagent.com](http://www.thechangeagent.com) for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*