Catch’em Good

Once upon a time, I worked for the guvment. My guvment job divided our management in two levels. Those that "supervised" kept the records, counseled the employee, and officially "disciplined", that is rewarded or punished the employee's actions ( or lack of). Those that "managed" were in the field, scheduling, assigning and monitoring the work, talking to the rank and file on a daily basis, and reporting on such to the "supervisors". We "managed" but did not "discipline". I was in that second tier.

I soon came to realize that my reports led to an employee's evaluation, which could lead to their promotion or days off without pay.

I was often counseled by certain supervisors to "watch" so and so, as they knew that employee was "a problem". If I spoke of them in positive terms, the super would express surprise.

Both I and my fellow strawbosses (for lack of a better term) came to realize that some of our supers saw their role as one of finding fault. The thought was, if I can punish a lot of employees, that's good for my (the super's) record. Very few of our supers saw their role as one of encouragement or improvement. We soon discovered who those supers were.

I took some courses in management and found that the guvment was more in favor of encouragement rather than punishment. Simply put, it was better to have an improving employee than have to fire one and then have to train a new employee.

In our discussions, both in and out of class, it became apparent that us strawbosses, along with our scheduling and such, should not only report BAD behavior, but needed to report the GOOD stuff too.

We needed to "catch'em doing something good". So, as a senior guy, I started training my replacements (!) in "catching the good stuff". Not only would we send in the time sheets (yes, they reported to work on time), but also a note about how they volunteered when we had extra duty, or when we saw them being polite to the public or taking a polishing rag to the equipment. Some of the supers told me they appreciated the good reports, but not all.

One fellow had a very minor accident. If he had said nothing, no one would have been the wiser, but he came to me and reported it. I inspected the situation, thanked him for his honesty and let him go. I reported this to his super, noting that the employee needn't have said anything to me, but he did and so I commended him for his honesty. The super replied that since this reporting was exactly what the employee should do anyway, it was nothing special, and don't bother me with such again. This super immediately dropped about fifty points in my estimation.

How does this apply to Scouting? Just a reminder that catching 'em doing something wrong should not be our goal. The bad stuff will happen, no matter our efforts. Instead, go looking and expecting to "catch'em doing something good". Very often we forget that "discipline" can be both reward AND punishment. And perhaps we need to concentrate on the reward part more. And I don't just mean patches and awards, tho they help. An "attaboy" to a Cubmaster or to the boy might be the difference between a dropped Scout and a future Eagle. A fun program? Tell'em so. An original idea for a"good deed"? Help them make it happen. A Scout who "did his best"? Let him know YOU know it.

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