

Dear Friends,

There is an expression, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." This is a phrase that has confounded me a bit as I have never wanted to catch flies. I would rather avoid them. But the phrase, as I understand it, is a proverb meaning that it is easier to get what you want by flattering people and being polite to them than by criticizing them or by making demands.

Think about it, would we rather hear a concern from a person who is critical or from one who has our best interests in mind?

In their book Crucial Accountability, authors Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan and Switzler suggest that those who are best at holding accountability conversations are persons who make good use of praise. Praise, in other words, is the best way to solve problems or to encourage a person to change because what praise indicates is mutual respect.

I was college when I was thrust into a position of being a supervisor for the first time. What my supervisor modeled for me was the importance of using encouragement as a building block of accountability. She taught me to never offer negative input without first laying a foundation of encouragement and sincere praise. My staff responded positively to the praise and received any critique given in a positive light. They wanted to improve because they knew that I wanted what was best for them.

The authors of Crucial Accountability found "the praise statistics never get better no matter how much we study them, talk about them, and lament their embarrassing consistency." This they say "is a function of the fact that our society suffers from obscured vision - we can only see the bad."

As Christians, the forgiveness offered to us by Jesus Christ and his instruction that we, his disciples, follow suit, ought to create a different story. We are encouraged by him to see the best in people and to strive to help sisters and brothers in Christ to be the best that they can be.

Praise creates a safe, trusting, and respectful environment within our congregations and communities. It is this kind of foundation on which a vital church is built and sustained.

*Alan A. Newton*