

Palisadian Perspective: The Critical Importance of Validation

Positive Feedback is Essential to Our Well-Being

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I broke up a relationship over the concept of validation.

My “almost” boyfriend and I were at dinner, talking about his daughter’s latest music video. She’s a talented musician and felt frustrated. Her career and passion had not translated to financial success or industry recognition.

In support, I said, “She’s a musician. No one can take her talent away. Maybe she just needs a little validation.”

Testily, he said, “What if she doesn’t get the validation?”

I simply suggested hearing from people who enjoy her music would feed her soul. It might give her the strength she needed to feel successful.

My almost boyfriend’s response was, “We should be confident enough with ourselves that we don’t need validation from others.”

In a dream scenario, his comment is ideal, but is it realistic? I had no idea “validation” could be such a trigger word. In my experience, it has positive connotations. Looking back, maybe *he* needed validation!

It doesn’t matter how successful someone is or isn’t: we *all* need validation. According to the National Science Foundation research, we wake up with 80% of our thoughts being negative. A negative feeling or encounter is so powerful that it outweighs positive feelings or interactions by 5:1, explaining why positive feedback is crucial to our well-being.

We are conditioned to expect validation at an early age. From the first steps we take and words we say—our parents are cheering for us; from those first foundational moments on, we seek the cheers. Validation becomes a mental banana split with three scoops of ice cream, chopped nuts, hot fudge sauce, whipped cream and cherries on top. We want it all.

As my dinner partner claimed, yes, there is the possibility we can be evolved to the degree we don’t seek validation from others; however, it’s not likely. That’s OK. Realistically, we need validation from our tribe, a work associate, a friend or even a stranger.



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Photo courtesy of Tami Holzman

Everything we do is to feel better about ourselves, even if it’s intended to be about someone else. For example, sending someone flowers on their birthday makes that person feel good, and it also makes *you* feel good.

Validation from others gives us a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling that our opinions and actions matter, we are understood, appreciated and valued. Giving validation shows others that they are accepted, brings people closer together and strengthens relationships. We are communicating acceptance. When you validate someone’s emotions, you indicate that you care about and accept them for who they are. It is empathy at its finest.

Let’s look at another side of the validation equation—that’s not so pretty, that can be painful, excruciating even—the no validation. Emotional invalidation is when a person’s thoughts and feelings are rejected, ignored or judged.

Invalidation is upsetting for anyone, but it’s particularly hurtful to someone who is emotionally sensitive. Invalidation disrupts relationships. It creates low self-esteem; it’s demotivating. “Silence

is deadly,” as they say.

Some people don’t have the emotional awareness or interpersonal skills to give validation to others. Some of us grew up without the role models or the tools to communicate with others. No validation becomes justified as “tough love” or other such terms that excuses the behavior.

Invalidation exists in many different types of relationships; let’s look at an example of how it plays out in a business setting. While pitching a new idea to a group of people, no one responds. What do you do?

A common reaction is to spin out of control. You keep talking in circles, for as long as it takes, to get a cheer. This feeling is no banana split; it’s more like when your ice cream scoop falls out of the cone and lands on the pavement with a sad splat.

Not giving feedback or responding to someone’s idea is passive-aggressive punishment of the worst kind. Maybe we don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings or embarrass them in a public setting, but the person pitching needs validation.

Perhaps instead of not responding, we could simply say,

“Joe, this is not right for us today. Thank you for bringing it to the group; we love hearing ideas from you; keep them coming.”

My therapist once said that if someone doesn’t get back to you, there is a reason they’re avoiding you. This avoidance happens in personal relationships all the time, i.e., boy/girl doesn’t call boy/girl back. The avoidance could be because the other person is simply not interested, but they lack the behavioral skill (giving validation) to say so.

I don’t think we give validation to other people enough. We often only speak up when they do something wrong instead of letting them know how fabulous and talented they are every day.

What would the world look like, and what could we accomplish if we felt more confident? An encouraging word can lead to extraordinary things! Isn’t it Buddha who said, “Change a life, change the world”?

Being emotionally deprived of positive feedback can create anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. This begs the question, is it unhealthy to seek validation?

Social media has changed the game in this regard, and it’s a tough one. I am over myself, promoting my books, my services and staying relevant. If I am over myself, I can only imagine how everyone else feels.

Sometimes, I’m lucky enough to get an unexpected phone call or email from someone letting me know how much they appreciate my content, always a pleasant surprise. I have learned to take things less personally, especially when it comes to social media validation, or invalidation, as the case may be.

We need to find a balance between our feelings of self-worth and what the rest of the world thinks. We can’t be jonesing for feelings of worthiness from others to the degree that we crumble without it.

So, what if what my almost-boyfriend said about his daughter was right? Is she set up for failure if she doesn’t get validation from her fans and friends?

Receiving validation can set you on the path to understanding and celebrating your purpose in life. Her music is her purpose.

So, next time you enjoy what someone is doing or creating, let them know. It may change their life. It may even change the world.