

## SPARK 034

(Matrix Code: **SPARK034.00** for [StartOver.xyz](http://StartOver.xyz) game.)

**DISTINCTION:** There is a difference between positive feedback and praise. Praise is conditioning.

**NOTES:** Either at home or at work, your value as a space holder derives from the quality of the coaching you provide. If you do not know the difference between positive feedback and praise, or negative feedback and blame, then you do not know the difference between coaching and manipulation. Without this distinction your communications can backfire and produce results opposite from what you intend.

Simple phrases such as, “Good work!” “Nice job!” “That is wonderful!” “I like that!” can all include a hidden manipulation of trying to get a person to keep performing the behavior that you approve of. If positive feedback includes the hidden purpose of manipulation then it is not positive feedback. It is praise, a form of conditioning, no different from training a dog by giving it treats if it does what you want. Instead of dog biscuits you give praise as the reward. You praise your husband or wife, your children, your employees, or your students with a hidden agenda to control their future behavior.

Positive feedback is not praise. Positive feedback is neutral and impersonal and communicates the simple message, “That worked.” Praise is not neutral. Praise includes a personal investment in creating a future result. The same is true of blame, which is trying to manipulate someone into changing or stopping behavior. The intention to manipulate is more difficult to see with praise because praise is so easily confused with positive feedback.

This distinction applies not only to giving positive feedback but also to receiving positive feedback. You have been trained that receiving positive feedback is good, and that receiving negative feedback is bad. Because of this cross wiring you then (unconsciously) think that if you are giving positive feedback then you are good, and if you are giving negative feedback then you are bad. To get through this confusion keep remembering that feedback is neither good nor bad. Feedback is neutral information. It is praise that implies “good behavior” and blame that implies “bad behavior.” Feedback is valuable because it respects the listener’s responsibility to choose to do whatever they want to about the feedback. Both praise and blame try to usurp that responsibility and instead try to manipulate a desired behavior from someone else.

The use of praise may be unconsciously rampant in your communications, especially with children. By becoming conscious of your desire to manipulate another person for your own benefit or comfort you can see that praise actually disempowers the other person. Praise takes away a person’s chance to assess the feedback as feedback and then make their own decisions about their behavior.

You may be so accustomed to being praised or blamed that before an interaction even begins you have already given your center away to the authority figure as an attempt to force them to give you only praise. In this way you are trying to manipulate the manipulators!

If you receive positive feedback from a neutral source and you respond by saying, "Oh, thank you!" as if you are being crowned as King or Queen Of The Day, then you have twisted positive feedback into praise. This makes you unreliable to receive positive feedback. You make the same error by twisting negative feedback into blaming you for being wrong or bad or stupid.

### **EXPERIMENTS:**

**SPARK034.01** The experiment is simple. Stop praising. Stop blaming. Practice cleaning up your communications. For example, when you want someone to keep doing something, stop giving them praise. Instead practice saying something like, "I want you to keep doing that." That is simple, honest, clear and not manipulative. When a child hands you their artwork instead of saying, "What a wonderful artist you are!" you could say, "Thank you very much for sharing this with me," or, "I feel glad to see you expressing yourself," or, "It looks like you had great fun making this!" And when you want someone to stop doing something, do not complain about it to someone else, or blame them, or ridicule the result. Instead practice saying something like, "I want you to stop doing that," or, "I want you to change what you are trying," or, "That is not okay with me." These cleaner communications will take you out of the domain of manipulation.

It becomes a little tricky to receive positive feedback without responding with the customary "Thank you!" If someone dollops you with a big blob of praise train yourself to simply say, "Thanks for the feedback," as if the feedback could equally well have been extremely negative and you would have received it with the same equanimity. Seeing that you are reliable to receive positive feedback by not changing it into praise they are free to give you more.

When you receive negative feedback, saying, "Thanks for the feedback," keeps you in relationship with the person giving you the feedback. They know you are using the negative feedback responsibly for your own self-improvement rather than using it irresponsibly for feeling inadequate or insecure, or for being offended. Seeing that you are reliable to receive negative feedback they are also free to give you more.