



By Joe Byerly

In 2005, my commander did something that had a profound impact on the next 14 years of my life: He wrote me a [short note](#). He said that he appreciated my hard work, it was being noticed, and that he thought I was going to make one hell of a leader.

From that day forward, I realized that short handwritten notes can have powerful effects on people. This kind of thoughtful act can make people feel appreciated and that their contributions matter. It can pick a person up who's having a bad day. And, the show of appreciation makes people more invested and engaged in the organization.

I'm not alone. Peyton Manning also learned the impact of a note firsthand. In a [2011 Los Angeles Times article](#) he said, "I remember when I got my first handwritten letter from Bobby Bowden, telling me he enjoyed watching me play. Boy, it had an impact on me. He took the time to write that letter. I knew it wasn't from his assistant." Throughout his career, Manning wrote notes to coaches, teammates, fans, and retiring players. He said he learned the practice from his mom, who made him and his brothers write notes to thank

relatives for gifts. The short video below highlights the appreciation from those who received his letters.

Doug Conant, the CEO responsible for [Campbell's Soup's turnaround](#), also used handwritten notes to connect with his employees. In a [2011 HBR article he wrote](#),

Believe it or not, I have sent roughly 30,000 handwritten notes to employees like Patti over the last decade, from maintenance people to senior executives. I let them know that I am personally paying attention and celebrating their accomplishments. (I send handwritten notes too because well over half of our associates don't use a computer). I also jump on any opportunities to write to people who partner with our company any time I meet with them. It's the least you can do for people who do things to help your company and industry. On the face of it, writing handwritten notes may seem like a waste of time. But in my experience, they build goodwill and lead to higher productivity.

When he was hospitalized years later in a terrible car accident, employees and friends flooded his hospital room with handwritten notes. He wrote years later that these letters of encouragement aided in his speedy recovery.

My commander, an NFL quarterback, and a CEO were all busy leaders. But the time they took to write a few words on a piece of paper meant so much more to those who received their notes. I'm not sure I still have all of the Army memorabilia that I've acquired over the years, but I've kept that note (and every other one I've received over the years). I keep it as a reminder that a small act, something as simple as handwritten correspondence, can let someone know they are appreciated. It probably only took him 10-15 minutes to do it, but it still resonates with me almost 15 years later.

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