



# The write note

By Aubrey Warren

**M**y wife and I recently sold our family home. After 22 years it was quite a task to pack. One of the things we discovered was the mountain of cards, letters, and notes we'd accumulated over the years.

Not that we hoarded such things, but there were a lot we just hadn't been able to throw out. And even having ruthlessly culled, there remains quite a collection of cards and handwritten notes we still just can't part with.

Strange that in a world where the average person gets more than 100 emails, text messages, and social media updates every day, we would treasure old-fashioned handwritten cards and notes. Or perhaps not.

It turns out that handwritten notes connect in quite powerful ways. And that makes them a simple but high-impact way of expressing appreciation, providing positive reinforcement, and recognising contributions and achievement.

Renowned as one of the toughest bosses in the world while at General Electric, Jack Welch was famous for his handwritten notes of appreciation.

Those notes reinforced his, and the company's, commitment to developing people. Doug Conant, CEO of the Campbell Soup Company, writes ten to twenty personal notes a day expressing appreciation, acknowledging achievements, welcoming new hires. And those notes, like Jack Welch's, get shared with colleagues, family, and friends—extending their impact and reinforcing a culture.

Understanding the personal impact written notes can have, the CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, writes personal notes to the families of employees, celebrating achievements and acknowledging the families' contribution to the employee's work. She even sometimes writes letters to the parents of executives. (*Forbes* magazine ranked her the tenth most powerful woman in the world in 2013.)

In our often de-personalised working environments, the positive impact of a word or note of recognition, appreciation, or encouragement can have a huge impact on energy and commitment.

There's nothing magical about a handwritten note, of course—it's what the note communicates. Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, said: 'There are two things people want more than sex

and money—they want praise and recognition'.

In *Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?* Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones write about the need people have to feel their work is significant: 'In simple terms, they need recognition for their contribution. Social scientists have made repeated pronouncements on [the] profound human need for recognition. So it is remarkable how often as individuals we seem to want it but not give it'.

Social scientist Randy Garner conducted some experiments to assess the impact of handwritten notes versus typical covering letters on responses to requests. 'Garner found that placing a personalised sticky note on the survey did more than simply persuade more people to respond to the survey: those who filled out the survey with the handwritten sticky-note message returned it more promptly and gave more detailed and attentive answers to the questions. And when the researcher made the note even more personal in nature by adding his initials and "Thank You!" to the handwritten message, the response shot up even higher'.

Personalised notes can even persuade dissatisfied customers to stick with you. Dan Hesse, CEO of Sprint (a telecommunications

company in the US), told *Forbes* magazine in 2012 about one of the customer satisfaction strategies his company used in moving from being the lowest rated to the most improved across a five-year period: ‘We have a voluntary program which is really going old school, that we call “Thank You Thursdays”. On Thursdays we gather in rooms, generally cafeterias in our offices across the country. Employees get together and we write handwritten thank you cards to our customers. It’s amazing the impact that it’s had on customers because not too many people get handwritten notes anymore’.

Handwritten or not, do you remember your reaction when you last received a personal note of appreciation? Have you noticed the reaction of someone who’s received a card or other note of appreciation? Do you keep a secret stash of letters, cards, or even sticky notes with words of recognition or appreciation? There is every chance that you do.

The value of a handwritten note is such that, in our digital-everything age, there are now even, yes, apps for sending ‘handwritten’ notes to people. That just seems wrong somehow, but it reinforces how much we value personalised approaches to communication.

As I write this my eye catches an ancient yellow sticky note shaped a bit like a star (maybe that’s why I kept it). The nine words on the star were written by someone in a workshop many years ago. Somehow I just haven’t been able to throw that little star note away and it remains posted on a wall. It’s not the note (or the handwriting), it’s what the note communicates, what it reminds me of, and how it continues to make me feel.

Personalised recognition and appreciation is not soft, silly, or superficial. It is often deeply meaningful to those who receive such notes. And they can be hard to write until you make them part of your

way of doing things (not only like the CEOs above, but also the head of a middle school, the public service manager, the small business owner, and the parent who immediately come to mind).

Restoring a touch of personalisation to our too-often de-personalised working environments can be simple, powerful, and humanising. It’s about communicating a sense of respect, care, and appreciation. It’s about sustaining the connections that create energy.

Maybe an occasional personalised message—even if it’s just on a Post-It® note—will provide the ‘write note’ for someone you know.

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# Seven reasons for believing in God



By Roy Lawrence

**B**ack in 2005, I had what theologians call a ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ experience. It was horrible. My faith deserted me and I found myself in a state of complete and utter spiritual darkness.

For a while not only could I not believe in God—but the very idea of God ceased to have any meaning for me.

My whole life in the ministry seemed at that time to be a delusion and a deception. It was agonising.

Mercifully this time did come to an end, however, and I found I was able to grope my way out of the darkness and rediscover a capacity for faith. In fact this re-discovered faith is stronger than ever. I now find unbelief quite impossible. So many totally compelling reasons for belief have now come to me, and I would like to share some of them with you.

## 1. Creation implies a creator

The basic and indisputable fact of life is that ‘stuff exists’. I exist, you exist, the universe exists. It seems plain common sense that it all has to come from somewhere. Five hundred years before Jesus the Greek philosopher Parmenides said: ‘Nothing comes from nothing’. It is a principle which has been acknowledged ever since then. Even those who believe that creation can be explained if you think that everything has evolved from