



## Specific Active Acknowledgement

**Summary:** This team-building activity is focused on improving the way we acknowledge and respond to others.

**Time required:** Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

**Materials required:** Printed copies of the three levels of acknowledgement or a flip chart to post them on.

### Instructions:

Before the session, create handouts documenting the three levels of acknowledgement (see below), or write them on a flipchart or board for everyone to see.

Here are three levels of acknowledgement:

1. **Acknowledgement** – May be a simple nod or “Good for you” without any significant show of emotion or engagement.
2. **Active acknowledgment** – Includes more energy and attention, e.g. looking the person in the eyes, being more enthusiastic in your response: “Wow! That’s great!”
3. **Specific, active acknowledgement** – Is descriptive, meaningful and focused. Includes details about why you appreciate something about the person, or what the other person said or did. It also includes a description of positive impact. Importantly, it also includes engaging the other person in discussion about what you are acknowledging them for:  
 “You got the promotion! Allowing yourself to open up to new possibilities has really paid off. What does this mean for you?”

### Suggested wording:

If a team member were to describe being very pleased because an idea for a new project had been well received, the person would likely appreciate your positive feedback. A specific, active acknowledgement would be to offer congratulations and ask for details about how it had happened, using open-ended questions while giving your full attention as they respond. You would maintain eye contact during the conversation and display a genuine positive reaction.

Let’s pick an example of someone successfully completing a drive to benefit a local food bank. I want you to consider how you would respond, using each of the three forms of acknowledgement explained earlier: acknowledgement, active acknowledgement and specific, active acknowledgement. Take a few minutes to think of an answer for each one and I’ll ask for some volunteers.

Examples of words that describe the approach to specific, active acknowledging:

• Enthusiasm	• Energy
• Focus on the other person	• Collaboration
• Openness	• Hopefulness
• Conscientiousness	• Supportiveness



**Instructions:**

*Following are some examples of how someone might respond for each level:*

*Acknowledgement: "Good job."*

*Active acknowledgement: "That's great. I'm so glad we can help people."*

*Specific active acknowledgement: "What fantastic news! Your enthusiasm carried us all through to this success. How do you feel about it?"*

*Less positive responses:*

- *"That's good. I'm sure the bosses will be pleased with you."*
- *"Was that really such a good idea? Maybe the company could be giving us all bonuses instead?"*

*Once team members have contributed some ideas, open a discussion about how the way they interact and communicate with each other can contribute to a more energized, civil and respectful work environment.*

*Conclude the session by sharing that this type of interaction may not always be practical due to time constraints, but when you can respond in a way that is specific and active, it can help build both team culture and social support. When you recognize someone responding in this way, you can acknowledge it by saying, "Thank you for your interest and encouragement."*

**Activity developed with help from:** Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.