



What does it mean to be appreciated?

FEEL

What does it mean to be appreciated? First you feel. You feel the sweat trickling from the trunk of your skin. and your towel drying the mask you've been wearing. The gym has been a haven, a company gift you are only just unwrapping. You've been here more times this week than in the past month. You remember the gaped mouth of your mother when you told her about your job. She joked that if she worked for a company that gave free gym memberships she would have never retired. Now that she's gone, this place pulls a new meaning. Who would have thought? Somehow the company's giving now comforts your grieving.

HEAR

You've been slowly returning to work, your hours flexible as your ten-year-old self was convinced you were before that awkward attempt at a backflip at your cousin's party. You enter, and the office soundtrack begins to play; the electric breeze of printers, the click of keyboards, the soothing whisper of coffee and herbal tea.

In your office you sit, you start, stop, knock, sit at your desk. The wheels of your chair seem to be rolling over your head. There's an urge inside you to get this work done at all costs. In your last workplace you had to bargain your breath for basics, and sometimes you find yourself wearing that same mindset. Suddenly, a number circles in your head, one shared by HR. A confidential hotline you never thought you would need, your fingers frying at the tips.

You pick up the phone and call it. You speak to someone about the way you sit, you start, stop, knock, sit at your desk. The voice on the other end is soothing as a cloud in spring. You recently told someone, my workplace treats its staff well. What you mean is their show of appreciation is not a performance solely for applause, nor is it a gallop of rehearsed words. It is a heart of conviction that others matter, that their life has value, that kindness is a currency.

This is what draws you in, it's what has kept you in.
You want to tell your manager this when he knocks on your door in that musical jazzy way he does.
But you contain your thoughts into a poised smile.

TASTE

You have missed the ritual of lunch with colleagues and find yourself jumping at the chance. You all gather in Wasabi, trade words as tangy-sweet as the teriyaki. These were the ones that shared the load during your absence, doing it with care, in wisdom to the world that keeps spinning. Now when you hear the word team, you see them.

SEE

We all want to be seen as individuals, as worthy of being seen. it's the way we are wired, a current that sails through us. Humanity would be boring if we were all the same person with the same hair style, shoes, and sweaty suit.

SMELL

Back in your office you open the window and the wind brings in a floral scent, reminds you of her on Sunday mornings. You breathe in, exhale. It feels so good to be back at work. Not for the sake of returning, not simply to keep busy, Not as escape from reality. But because you love it here. Today is a colleague's birthday, you open the group e-card. Before you type your message you read the other well wishes, chuckle as you recite them in their voices. This is a place you trust to invest your smile in.

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Theresa Loda

British Nigerian poet and writer

