Revitalize Your Recognition Program

Four ways to keep your recognition program fresh and exciting

By Mike Byam, January 2014

Recognition is possibly one of the world's simplest and most amazing universal concepts. As people, we are willing and even eager to give our best when our efforts are recognized and appreciated by those we respect. Psychologist and Philosopher William James wrote, "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." When we put that principle into practice in the workplace, it can be one of the most refreshing and rewarding experiences to be a part of. As with just about any initiative, it's helpful to take a step back from time to time and take a mental inventory— is this program making as much of an impact on our employees as it can, and is it continuing to move our organization in a positive direction?

The New Year marks an ideal time to take a look back and get a sense of the overall impact that your recognition program has had on your employees and your organization as a whole the year prior. In order to keep a recognition program fresh and exciting means having all components working in harmony. From time to time this process can take some 'fine tuning'. Based upon our experiences working with many different organizations and many different program situations, we've outlined 4 specific ways we've seen organizations breathe new life into their recognition programs.

1. **Reshape Management's View of Recognition**. The outdated approach is to think of recognition as a nice thing to do. Of course it's true that you would be hard pressed to find an employee who doesn't appreciate being recognized for his or her contributions, but the bigger picture is that companies can't afford *not* to recognize their employees. In order to revitalize recognition in an organization, the first step is reshape managers' view of recognition and to educate "what's in it for them" to support a culture of recognition within their team.

   Most businesses work to get their management teams into this frame of mind through training. The key takeaway for managers to internalize is that recognition is one of the most effective ways to communicate goals and objectives and to reinforce positive behaviors that lead to success.

Employees who contribute at a high level thrive on recognition and are less likely to seek other jobs if they feel like their contributions are appreciated.

It is also important to help managers understand what employees expectations are for feedback and recognition. Many managers simply don't realize how frequently their people need to hear positive feedback. According to Business Insider, in order to keep employees engaged, they should be getting some form of recognition at least *once per week*. Now the pushback you're likely to get from managers is that they are far too busy to be giving that level of recognition on a regular basis, and to some extent, it's a fair objection.

What does this step look like in practice? We've worked with organizations who handle it any number of ways. Terryberry has an entire division devoted to giving private group training sessions for managers. Consider including training on your recognition program and managers' roles as part of the orientation process for new managers. Performance reviews are another opportunity for self-check and to reinforce the importance of recognition skills and emotional intelligence. We work with organizations who give people a recognition guidebook and toolkit when they are promoted into a manager role. Finally, give managers a business case for recognition, make it simple to do, and in many businesses you'll see an immediate impact.

2. **Re-Align with Corporate Objectives.** From time to time, we run into recognition programs that have struggled because the objectives which had been outlined in the recognition program have not kept up with the changing objectives of the organization. To survive over time, it is important to review your recognition program periodically and ensure that the goals employees are being asked to achieve line up with what is important to your business today.

   Furthermore, what we see missing is the essential piece connecting the dots between the achievements employees are being recognized for and how those achievements support the mission, vision and values of the organization. This is vital to a successful recognition program and is often overlooked. When employees are given recognition, it is essential to connect the recognition to a specific attitude, behavior, or contribution that the individual has demonstrated. Second, connect that attitude, behavior or contribution to why it is important to the success of the business.

   Recognition is a powerful opportunity to reinforce your competitive advantages and your corporate mission with every employee interaction. Too often, one or both of these pieces are missing. If you give your people

an understanding of how they can impact the success of the business-- and sincere appreciation when they do-- you are miles down the road to a vital recognition culture.

3. **Ramp Up Communication.** The communication of the program can be a great opportunity to make a strong connection with employees. The way employees are invited to participate in the recognition program is perhaps one of the more frequently underutilized aspects of a recognition strategy.

   The outdated approach to program communication is a one-time program launch. I often see one of two things happening: First, quite simply, the information about the program just doesn't make it to employees. For instance, the leadership team creates this wonderful recognition program, congratulate themselves, shoots an email out to all their employees, and finally, checks it off the list. Even more often, what happens is the program has been in place for a while, maybe a couple of years, and the leadership team assumes everyone knows about the details. Second, what can happen is the doldrums. Sometimes the communication materials that are dispersed to the employees can be somewhat bland in their look and feel. Recognition communications are our opportunity to break loose with some fun and exciting communication materials. Get your thinking caps on!

   The new method of communication involves weaving recognition into the regular ongoing messaging with your participant group. Each time that the program is communicated to employees is an opportunity to make a connection. Remember it takes 11.3 impressions for your message to stick with your audience. If you feel like you've told the story about your recognition program a hundred times, you've probably done about half as much as you need to. Communicate with a purpose. Use your program overview materials for more than just the logistic information. Highlight an employee's milestone or achievement on a poster or company newsletter. Start every staff meeting with recognition for a new hire or individual accomplishment. Harness the power of social media. Use images of recognition recipients or events. The snowball effect of social recognition keeps your message fresh, relevant and personal. With promotion materials such as these, you accomplish many goals; you tell the story about why recognition is important and how to participate, and you demonstrate how employees can earn recognition.

4. **Refine the Process.** We can't outsource appreciation to a computer and we wouldn't want to. Recognition is by definition a personal human interaction. Technology's role is to replace complicated processes and improve simplicity in order to enable more and better personal interaction. As we mentioned, it becomes easy for recognition opportunities to be overlooked or pushed to the

backburner on the priority list when the process is daunting and time-consuming. In order to bridge this gap, many organizations have found success reducing these inconsistencies across departments by creating a centralized framework to provide reminders for managers that removes unnecessary steps in the fulfillment process. This lets managers focus their recognition efforts on the face-to-face interaction with their people, instead of navigating paperwork. Introduce technology to make recognition easier, more flexible and more frequent. According to a recent article in Business News Daily, Bersin & Associates have researched that organizations that effectively use technology in their employee recognition strategy are "three times more likely to be in the top quartile of business performance." Platforms such as Terryberry's 360 Recognition utilize a centralized administration dashboard that allows organizations to manage all of their employee recognition initiatives such as service awards, peer recognition, and sales awards from one roof. When technology is used properly, it guards against overlooked opportunities and enables more achievements to be highlighted.

Although recognition can be one of the world's most simple and worldwide concepts, it's known to get put on the backburner from time to time in the everyday shuffle. Taking a step back and evaluating the impact your recognition program is having on your employees and organization, might be the best step in the right direction. Is your leadership team supporting a culture of recognition and is your program aligned with your organization's mission, vision and values? How can you increase the communication of your recognition program's message and what steps could you take in refining the process, ensuring that no recognition opportunity is overlooked in future. After all, your employees are "craving to be appreciated."

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