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## A.C.T. Now Recognition

by Greg Butterfield  
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A healthcare provider with 44 location managers recently approached our group looking to create a simple, concise road map their management team could use to communicate their appreciation to those who have gone above and beyond.

The program administrator reported the following: “Our last, in-house effort was over simplified and lacked specificity. Before that, our attempt at ‘simple and concise’ yielded a more detailed approach, but our managers felt it was much more complicated than it needed to be.”

During our second planning session with this client, we landed on “A.C.T. Now Recognition” as the catch phrase for this new program. The A.C.T. portion is an acronym for Appropriate, Conected and Targeted; while the Now underscores the value and benefit of immediate gratification.

It was our sense that this easy to remember program name also provided the guidelines this organization felt were critical to doing the job right.

We developed a training outline that precisely defined the terminology and action steps required.

**Appropriate**: It was the goal of the sponsoring organization, as well as our own, to make certain that this organization’s efforts to show their appreciation for those who go above and beyond were apropos given the action, the culture and the recipient.

We asked managers this: “How well do you know your co-workers, the people you manage and those who manage you? Are you aware of the successes they’ve had and hurdles they face both on the job and off?” The premise, of course, is that this knowledge makes you a more effective leader and contributor. Some of the people who work in your group may have been a part of the organization for a long time and perhaps even a part of your team. Others, through reorganization or acquisition, may be new to your group. Regardless, times have changed and likely so have your people. They are bombarded with news of the dire economy everyday just as you are, and this can surely dampen enthusiasm and productivity. Put simply, your employees are likely stressed and feeling vulnerable. They're questioning whether the time and effort they've put into their careers will produce the returns they expected.

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Knowing your people and how they react to stress and to recognition underscores your respect and appreciation for them and their work. Take the time to reconnect with those you work with and your team will be better prepared to deal with adversity and celebrate success

It is this understanding and knowledge of your people on a personal level that makes it possible for managers to approach each person in the most APPROPRIATE way. We all know a deserving employee who is shy and retiring, prompting that manager to approach this recipient privately on a one-on-one basis. Or, perhaps this extraordinary employee is the type to embrace a public presentation with family, management, and co-workers in attendance.

Whatever the platform for the presentation, unless it is APPROPRIATE, even the best of intentions will go awry. Remember, what you say and how you say it is not only determined by business decorum, but should take into account the person you want most to impact with your words!

**Connected**: Understanding and connecting to the mission, vision and values of your organization is a critical step in the recognition process. There must be a consistent CONNECTION; a very clear line of sight between the actions you want and expect from your people on a daily basis and what can be found in your company mission.

Your corporate mission should outline the company's aspirations and purpose, and provide an emotional tie to employees. A meaningful, clearly articulated mission is your company's moral compass.

When the waters get murky, as they have recently, your mission statement helps your company plot its course through rough times by providing a solid foundation that reminds everyone of the organization's purpose. This is what we believe in as a group, and all of what we do going forward is based on this premise.

Saying thank you is a critical component of the recognition process. However, to maximize the impact, be sure to communicate how that individual or team brought the organization closer to achieving an important company milestone as this is what connects action to mission!

Unless your recognition initiative is CONNECTED to the company's mission and culture, you will struggle to build a case or develop metrics for a new or ongoing system.

Be certain your appreciation efforts are directed toward those who embody the mission through their understanding and willingness to meet or exceed the aligned goals and objectives. In other words, make sure you are paying attention to those who are paying attention!

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**Targeted:** What is it that this employee did that caught the attention of a manager, co-worker, patient or visitor? To answer this, we asked the group to pull together a list of the attitudes, behaviors and contributions that the organization values most.

They identified the following attitudes as important and beneficial in their people and their organization: perseverance, confidence, flexibility, creativity, optimism, caring and resilience.

The behaviors deemed most award-worthy included staff they described as: dependable, results-oriented, proactive, willing to teach and learn, detail-oriented and good time managers.

Contributions are typically industry specific, so I have listed some measures and/or tools I have seen organizations use to determine value: project or training completion, change implementation, volunteerism, improved skill set/competency testing, sales growth, increased profitability, improved ROI, customer and/or employee satisfaction surveys, green orientation, efficiency increases, dollars/time saved, leadership development.

These are the attitudes behaviors and contributions that this organization values most and they are aligned or connected to the company mission. Communicating these expectations and then recognizing those who personify these traits and actions is the best way to underscore them.

Remember, what gets recognized gets reinforced and remembered!

**NOW:** It is difficult to understate the value of immediate gratification, and the negatively correlated impact of waiting to show your appreciation...the longer you wait, the less impact it will have.

The moment the thought hits you that a person in your employ deserves your appreciation, step up and take that action. Find the proper moment, place and words whether verbal or on paper and tell that person what that action meant to you and the organization.

If you want to build a team of good people taking extraordinary steps, you must communicate your expectations and then recognize those who go above and beyond. There is no better way to do this than through well-timed and well-conceived appreciation.

In review, your recognition efforts should be:

- **A**ppropriate: fitting and respectful given the action, the company and the recipient.

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- Connected: Always and forever aligned with the mission, vision and values of your organization.
- Targeted: Directed toward reinforcing the attitudes, behaviors and contributions your organization values most.

When you see or it has been reported to you as a manager that one of your people was caught in the act of “doing it right”, the time to A.C.T. is **NOW!**

**Greg Butterfield** is a Senior Partner with the Terryberry Company, an international firm that specializes in employee recognition systems. He brings 28 years of experience in the field, oversees Southeastern operations and heads up Terryberry’s Recognition University division.

Greg has a Master’s degree in Educational Psychology, and has earned the Certified Recognition Professional designation from Recognition Professionals International. In addition to speaking extensively on the topic to groups around North America, he has consulted with hundreds of organizations ranging from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies on developing and implementing recognition programs for talent retention and performance improvement.

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