

Employee Recognition ...five suggestions for getting it right

Keeping employees plugged into their jobs and coming into work with good attitudes is something all good managers work hard at. One of the best ways to help accomplish this is through meaningful recognition.

In much the same way that having a well-organized, safe workplace serves as the backbone for quality and efficiency of work performed, so the recognition of employees serves as the lifeblood of the organization.

But going about this can be tricky and fraught with claims of “favoritism,” unfairness, and displeasure if employees feel their manager is handing out the recognition subjectively. Here are a few simple guidelines for helping you when handing out the praise...

#1 Avoid rewarding competence. Handing out praise, prizes or serving up special perks for workers who are doing what they are supposed to be doing is never a good idea. If you do, how can you ever expect them to do something out of the ordinary? Save the rewards for the extraordinary, for the extra efforts that go above and beyond what is expected and which in turn make a real difference.

#2 Know what to look for but don't set rigid parameters. Knowing what “extraordinary” looks like is sometimes difficult to articulate. But more often than not, you'll know it when you see it. Keep an open mind as to what actions deserve recognition. If you follow a predictable formula, employees will quickly learn how to game your system. Did an employee go out of his/her way to solve a problem for customer? When confronted with an unusual need from a member did the employee go the extra mile to help get it resolved? A kind word, a pat on the back, a quick email of thanks will go a long way.

#3 Do it soon. Don't wait until the annual review or Christmas party to hand out praise for exceptional work that was done earlier in the year. The passage of time dilutes the effect. Recognition needs to be done as soon as you become aware of the accomplishment. That spontaneity makes it genuine and tells the employee that you couldn't wait to let him/her know how impressed you are.

#4 Mix up the recognition. A drawer full of \$10 gift cards looks like a tip you picked up at the last seminar you attended. Get a little more creative, being careful to match the reward to the deed. The aloof employee who wowed the customer shouldn't get a paid day off for his fine feat, but maybe the person who put in extra time to help solve a difficult need of a member deserves one. Also, consider the interests of the individual. Two tickets to a game for a fan might resonate far more than a day off.

#5 Really, really mean it. Your recognition should never look like it came out

of the last seminar you just came back from. Although employees appreciate any recognition they can get, there's nothing like looking an employee in the eye, and from the heart telling him/her, "You nailed it. I just want to let you know how much I appreciate what you did. Great work. Thank you."

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