

How to Provide Meaningful Recognition to Your Employees

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In these uncertain and tight economic times, MEANINGFUL employee recognition becomes more important than ever. Do you feel appreciated and valued by your boss and your organization? Do your employees feel appreciated and valued by you and by the organization? It turns out that there is a real disconnect between what companies do and what employees want when it comes to recognition. Consider the following:

- 90% of companies have an active employee recognition program¹
- 66% of workers felt that they had received no recognition on the job in the last year¹
- 27% of employees who want to be recognized in non-monetary ways (e.g., award merchandise, gift cards or trips, etc.) are recognized that way²
- 27% of employees who want to be recognized by a symbolic award (e.g., certificate, trophy, plaque, etc.) are recognized that way²
- 29% of employees who want to be recognized by a cash bonus are recognized that way²
- 30% of employees who want to be recognized by a recognition event are recognized that way²
- 40% of employees who want to be recognized by written praise are recognized that way²

Companies typically consider three factors when creating and implementing employee recognition programs. Those factors are cost, convenience, and consistency. Focusing on these factors ensures that the recognition programs will be cost-effective, easy to administer, and fair. These factors, however, do NOT ensure that the recognition programs will be meaningful to the employee(s). Rarely do companies consider how employees will feel as a result of the recognition program. Employee recognition produces maximum benefits to an organization (e.g., increased satisfaction, better morale, and improved retention) only when the recognition is meaningful to employees.

The Platinum Rule

As children, we learned the Golden Rule: Treat others as YOU want to be treated. When recognizing employees, we need to aspire to an even higher standard - the Platinum Rule³: It states that we should treat others as THEY want to be treated. Obviously, you can't always give people what they want (e.g., cash, time off, etc.). That fact of life makes it even more important that you recognize others the way THEY want to be recognized. No matter how small or insignificant, you want whatever recognition you give to be meaningful to the individual employee. So, how do you know what is/will be meaningful to employees?

Tools to Help You Provide Meaningful Recognition

One way to know how employees want to be recognized is to ask them. Rather than using survey data to assess how most employees in your organization want to be recognized (9 times out of 10, they will say more money), consider asking each of your employees how they want to be recognized. A tool that any manager can use to do this is a Favorites List. This recognition tool is simply a series of questions about an employee's favorites such as color, candy, sports team, store, restaurant, music, authors, etc. Create your own list of questions and collect that information from each employee. When you want to recognize the employee, refer to this information and create a form of recognition (no matter how small) that is meaningful to the employee. Examples might be a package of their favorite candy, a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant or store, OR tickets to their favorite sporting or entertainment event. This simple and powerful tool allows you to provide meaningful recognition that meets all budget, time or other requirements you have.

A second way to provide meaningful recognition to your employees is to create a Recognition Matrix. Recognition can be public or private. It can also be oral or written. Use the following table to identify the cell(s) in which each of your employees fall. For recognition to be most meaningful, it needs to be specific and it needs to describe who benefited from the behavior being

recognized and how. Use what you know about each of your employees to decide where they fit in the recognition matrix. Then, use the information below to praise and recognize employees in a way that is most meaningful to them.

Type of Recognition	Oral	Written
Private, one-on-one	Say thank you to employee - in passing, in your office, over lunch, etc.	Write an email or short note of appreciation to the employee
Public; group	Have a formal or informal group meeting with work team and/or others who are relevant to recognition (superiors, customers, etc.)	Send an email to the person/copying the work team, superiors, or others who are important to the employee; write a short article for the company newsletter; write a short note to the employee's family

Recognition is about more than just giving employees money, gifts or praise. A third, and often forgotten, tool for providing meaningful employee recognition is to help employees achieve their goals. Find out what employees want to do and identify ways to support them in getting there. Assigning them new or different job responsibilities, asking them to participate on a special projects team, allowing them to coach/mentor other employees (or enabling them to be coached/mentored by someone) are all important ways you can provide meaningful recognition to your employees.

For employee recognition to be most effective to the employee AND to the organization, it must make the employee feel appreciated and valued. Remember, recognition is not about what is done to an employee. It is about how that something that is done (whatever it is) makes the employee feel. To make employees feel valued and appreciated, managers must treat employees as THEY want to be treated. Start practicing the Platinum Rule with your employees today.

Recognition Survey Data and Resources

1. 2005 Employee Recognition Survey by World and Work and National Association for Employee Recognition; results based on 614 organizations
2. 2006 Maritz poll of 1,002 full-time employees
3. The Platinum Rule by Tony Alessandra, Ph.D.
4. Recognition Professionals International (formerly the National Association for Employee Recognition); an international, non-profit association focused on the research and best practices of employee recognition and engagement; for more info, visit www.recognition.org
5. For more ideas on employee recognition and rewards, check out the Resources page of Bob Nelson's website; Bob Nelson is the author of 1001 Ways to Reward Employees; <http://www.nelson-motivation.com/resources.html>

About the Author

Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR is President of Brannick HR Connections (BHRC). She is an organizational psychologist that consults, writes, and speaks on recruiting, hiring, engagement, and leadership trends and best practices. She is the co-author of Finding and Keeping Great Employees, a Fortune Magazine "Best Business Book." Her insights have appeared in many business and HR publications including Fortune Magazine, HR Magazine, and the Wall Street Journal. For more information about BHRC's services, call (813) 672-0500 or visit www.BrannickHRConnections.com.