



Employee Recognition That Packs a Punch

By: Lisa Speas

“The deepest principle of human nature is a craving to be appreciated.”

- William James

Employee recognition can do wonders to spark motivation and fuel productivity. It helps to keep employees focused on key goals, dedicated to their jobs, engaged, and loyal...which will impact your organization's success! Research shows that, while money is important to employees, what really motivates them to perform is the thoughtful, personal recognition for a job well done. In fact, according to the Great Place to Work Institute, recognition is one of the top three key drivers of employee engagement.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter produced in the brain that creates positive emotions like satisfaction and enjoyment. Recognition makes people feel good because it gives them a dopamine hit which creates feelings of pride and pleasure. We could all certainly use more dopamine hits and positivity with all that is going on in the world!

Lack of praise plays into a problematic but absolutely human psychological response: the negativity bias. Our capacity to weigh negative input heavily most likely evolved for a good reason—to keep us out of harm's way. From the dawn of human history, our very survival depended on our skill at dodging danger. Therefore, the brain developed systems that would make it unavoidable for us not to notice danger and thus, hopefully, respond to it. Today, we aren't likely to be chased by lions or tigers, but we still have this response hardwired into our brains. What can we do to counteract this tendency? Give and receive regular positive feedback and recognition!

Studies have shown that to maintain a positive relationship, employees need at least three compliments for every criticism. It's kind of like an emotional bank account. You make a deposit into the account as you give praise and a withdrawal that is at least three times as large as you give constructive feedback. You want to keep that bank account in the green to maintain a positive relationship with the employee and to keep them motivated and receptive when you need to give them constructive feedback.

We see that recognition is a good thing. Why is it so underutilized? According to Gallup's Q12 survey, less than 33% of American workers strongly agree that they have received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days. I think that often we just don't take the time to recognize others as we are so busy with our day-to-day work. And some leaders may feel that employees should just be happy that they have a job. However, if you want to get the most out of your employees, you have to keep them pumped up. Variation in response to the recognition Q12 question is responsible for a ten to twenty percent difference in revenue and productivity which is huge!

There are essentially two types of recognition – Formal recognition and Spot/informal recognition. Formal recognition programs are planned, structured programs that are typically repeated over time. These programs have

specific criteria that reinforce the vision and values of the organization or core areas of measurement. Examples include programs such as service awards and employee of the month.

Spot/informal recognition occurs on a day-to-day basis, where the rubber meets the road. This includes spontaneous thanks and appreciation for exceptional service, teamwork, or behavior. To make this recognition most effective. I like to use the PATS acronym as a guideline.

P – Take an employee’s personal preferences into account, realizing that not all employees like to be recognized in the same way.

A – Make it authentic and sincere.

T – Make it timely, giving recognition as soon as possible after the desired behavior or achievement.

S – Make it specific by identifying the behavior that is being recognized and the impact it had.

Below are some methods you can use for spot/informal recognition.

Topic	Guidelines
Personal praise and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research indicates that personal praise is ranked as the most important type of recognition.• You can praise employees directly, in front of others, or when they are not around knowing that word will get back to them.
Written praise and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing a personal or Thank You note can have a big impact on feelings of appreciation.• Sharing praise through emails or texts.• Asking Senior Leaders to share a note of appreciation for exemplary employee performance.
Public praise and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing recognition in forums such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Staff meetings○ Posting or sharing recognition information○ Social media○ Newsletters
Tangible rewards and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This involves awarding items to employees such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Cash, check or spot bonus○ Gift cards○ Nominal gifts (mugs, pens, candy)

We have maintained that recognition is important and we generally don’t do enough of it. What are some things that you or your organization could do to hardwire recognition into your DNA? Below are some suggestions.

- Develop a system where you are regularly writing and sending Thank You Notes and encourage other leaders to do the same.
- Have recognition resources such as cards, trinkets, etc. readily available to make recognition easy.

- Have employees complete an Employee Recognition Form to help you tailor future recognition. Document information such as hometown, family information, hobbies, favorite food, favorite restaurant, favorite author, favorite music, favorite sports team, pets, and preferred method of recognition at work.
- Verbally thank team members for their contributions regularly.
- Plan team celebrations for birthdays, to welcome new employees, or to celebrate goal accomplishment.
- Recognize employees on your company website or through social media.
- Encourage employees to recognize their coworkers through peer recognition programs, in meetings, or through verbal praise.
- When talking with employees, ask for feedback on who has been particularly helpful to them and pay it forward.
- Set regular reminders on your calendar for every couple of weeks to ask yourself, *“What great results or behaviors have occurred that I should stop to recognize?”*.

For many organizations, working remotely has become the new normal. It can be challenging but is it possible to keep remote employees engaged using recognition as a strategy. You can pretty much use any of the things that we have covered. Here are some additional tips that you can use for remote engagement.

- Set up a recognition platform such as Slack, Good Hangout, or Teams and use it like a virtual water cooler. For example, you could start the day off with a good morning message or meme. You could use this forum to recognize personal accomplishments and for peer recognition.
- Hold regular get-togethers such as virtual meetings, breakfasts, lunches, and happy hours to lessen the impact of isolation and build camaraderie.
- Get creative with it! Send out virtual kudos and celebrate fun holidays. The website, <https://www.daysoftheyear.com>, has information on various observances and celebrations throughout the year. There is a day for everything!

We will conclude with one of my favorite quotes:

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you make them feel.” - Maya Angelou

If you’d like more information, feel free to contact me at:

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