Tailoring Recognition to Fit Your Employees' Needs[1]

Matt Benge[2]

Introduction

Employee recognition plays a key role in the success and continuity of productivity, efficiency, and organizational change. Heathfield (2016) explains that people who feel appreciated are more positive about themselves and their ability to contribute, and people with positive self-esteem are potentially your best employees. The research surrounding employee recognition provides a staggering vantage point from which to view recognition:

- A lack of recognition is the second largest risk factor for psychological distress in the workplace (Brun & Dugas, 2008).

- Organizations with recognition programs, which are highly effective at enabling employee engagement, had 31% lower voluntary turnover than organizations with ineffective recognition programs (Bersin by Deloitte, 2012).

- Companies with strategic recognition reported a mean employee turnover rate that is 23.4% lower than retention at companies without any recognition program (SHRM/Globoforce, 2012).

- Companies using strategic recognition are 48% more likely to report high engagement (SHRM/Globoforce, 2012).

- The number one reason most Americans leave their jobs is that they do not feel appreciated. In fact, 65% of people surveyed said they got no recognition for good work last year (Rath & Clifton, 2004).

The impact of employee recognition can be seen in many areas, such as increasing morale, belonging, commitment, satisfaction, and retention (Saunderson, 2004). However, not every employee views recognition with the same lens. You should expect that employees appreciate and value recognition in various forms, and therefore create recognition to match the needs of your employees.

Employee Recognition Practices

Brun and Dugas (2008) suggest recognition takes four main forms (Figure 1): (1) personal recognition, (2) recognition of results, (3) recognition of work practice, and (4) recognition of job dedication. Every employee is different in regards to the type of recognition that resonates with them. From individual to job performance recognition, managers and supervisors can identify and implement specific practices to recognize employees in the workplace.
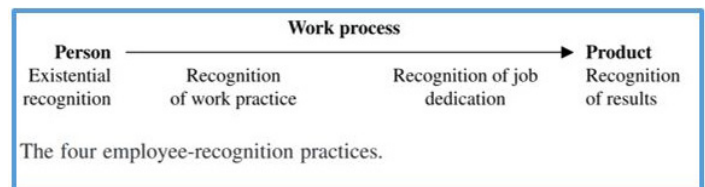

Figure 1. The four employee recognition practices.

Personal Recognition

- Verbal recognition at social gatherings
- Recognition ceremony among coworkers
- Personalized letters for life events
- Involving employees in the decision-making process

Recognition of Results

- Give a gift to mark a career goal/award/milestone
- Awarding raises and grants based on merit
- Notes to office employees highlighting successes
- Plaques and certificates

Recognition of Work Practice

- Highlighting contributions, innovative thinking, and creativity at team meetings
- Assignments to special projects or committees
- Verbal thanks from clients for the quality of service

Recognition of Job Dedication

- Encouragement from peers to keep up effort and collective engagement
- Recognizing overtime
- Allowing employees time off to relax

Conclusion

Recognition can be viewed as a form of professional development, and should therefore be intentional and strategic. Creating an individualized recognition plan takes time and proactive decision-making. Reaping the rewards of employee retention and work productivity through employee recognition is similar to program development and evaluation models in that the long-term impact is not evident right away. Managers and supervisors can tailor recognition efforts to meet the individual needs and goals of each employee by utilizing the recognition practices outlined by Brun and Dugas in order to create a plan for recognizing employees.

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