

FOCUS

Thank You So Much

Effective recognition in the workplace
by Lynne Ng

Apr 2010 | It's a well known fact that employees that feel appreciated have a more positive outlook at work and contribute significantly more than those that do not. But not so well known is the fact that recognition doesn't have to be expensive or complex to implement...and can sometimes be as simple as just saying "Thank You So Much".

In either strong or challenging economic times, good talent can be hard to find...and once found, even more difficult to retain. Countless workplace studies over the years have shown that employees look to change jobs, not because of salary or benefit reasons, but because they are undervalued or poorly appreciated. What an unnecessary waste.

Of real importance in this area is a firm understanding of what a company wants to achieve through its recognition programme or effort. Companies need to have specific criteria for recognition, so that it doesn't come down to 'who-likes-who' type decisions. Some companies go over the top with multiple 'employee of the month' style reward programmes – to the point that their importance becomes reduced and employees feel anything but recognised or appreciated. Mass or automated recognition, that is not personalised or specific to an individual, has also been proven to be less effective than one-on-one recognition.

Recognition need not always be about the individual.

Here are five tips for effective recognition in the workplace:-

- 1. Make it Personal!** An automated e-mail or gift that is generated from a payroll software when an employee reaches a five or ten year anniversary - without any involvement or personalisation from the employee's manager - is going to leave them feeling cold and definitely under-appreciated.
- 2. Involvement.** Involve the employee where possible and give them a number of different recognition options. Make recognition about 'them' and not about 'us' or 'me'.
- 3. Make Recognition a Public Thing!** A recognition plaque that hangs on a wall for a month and is then removed, really doesn't too say much about the longevity or importance of the recognition. Ensure that your internal and external communications team know about any recognition awards. Ensure that updates about these are included in newsletters, on websites and blogs and in social media. The added value of 'on-line' recognition is that it stays on the web and will be found well into the future. Additionally, other employees can be inspired and motivated by those that have been recognised. Make it infectious!
- 4. Keep It Real.** A guaranteed way to reduce the importance and effectiveness of a recognition programme is to nominate or reward somebody for something that they haven't done or didn't deserve. Crazy as it sounds it regularly happens – often when a manager or supervisor does not have a close working relationship with an employee.
- 5. Give Productive Feedback.** If being recognised is a result of achieving targets or sales numbers, ensure that those that are eligible know how they are performing and what more they need to achieve. Don't leave them in the dark wondering how they're doing when you can involve and engage them.

It's a fact that some managers find it difficult to recognise or congratulate those who should be applauded. This may be down to inexperience or poor management skills. Challenges or inadequacies in this area cannot be ignored and human resources or senior management must step in as soon as such issues become apparent.

Successful recognition, when done right, is a great form of team building, which in these challenging times, can help unite teams and bring colleagues together. Recognition need not always be about the individual. Of equal importance is how teams, departments or those handling special projects are congratulated or thanked for their involvement or contribution.

Finally, it is often the smallest and most inexpensive forms of recognition that can provide the greatest satisfaction to the recipient. Gestures such as hand-written notes, a telephone call or a small gift.

The key is to know and understand the person or team honoured. What will make them appreciate the gesture and what will bring a smile to their face? ■



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She is passionate about team training and professional service delivery and is a past recipient of the Adecco Chairman's Award – an award presented by the Adecco SA Group Chairman to a select few global colleagues every year for outstanding achievement. Lynne, who is married with two children, is based in Singapore.