

Employee Engagement & Recognition Guide for Leaders

Employee recognition is not just a nice thing to do. It is a communication tool that reinforces and rewards the most important outcomes people create for our business. When you recognize people effectively, you reinforce the actions and behaviours you most want to see people repeat. An effective employee recognition system is simple, immediate, and powerfully reinforcing.

Recognition Principles

Here are some things to consider, regarding recognition:

1. **Do it right away** - Recognition should happen as soon as possible, after the behaviour or action, so that there is clear a link from the positive behaviour to the positive results, which reinforces the behaviour or action.
2. **Be specific** - Tell them exactly what it was you recognized and appreciated.
3. **Make it personal** - Recognition is not one-size-fits all. Thought needs to go into what would be appreciated by the person being recognized. Ask your team how they would like to be appreciated. See the Recognition Ideas section below for some ideas.
4. **Be sincere** - Do it because you're truly appreciative.
5. **Be Positive** - Don't mix in criticism. Balanced feedback is important and means clearly communicating the things people do well and those things that need further improvement. While you should be communicating both sides, you shouldn't always put both messages together. When recognizing positive behaviour and actions, focus purely on those, so people are motivated to continue them.
6. **Don't wait for perfect performance** to acknowledge a genuine effort on the part of the employee.

Recognition Ideas

There are endless ways to motivate your team and to recognize their contributions. As mentioned earlier, the way in which you recognize someone, should be tailored the accomplishment and to the interests and motivations of that individual or team. Here are just a few ideas:

1. **"Chatting"** - A simple "hello" at the start of the day and "goodbye" at the end of the day is an obvious but sometimes overlooked form of recognition. It tells people "I'm glad you're here". Also, spending just a few minutes chatting can open lines of communication and can set a positive tone.
2. **Simply saying thank you** - Say a sincere thank you for a job well done. Do this often and be specific. For example: "you handled that carrier well, thank you" or "thanks, those were some really good ideas that you provided at the team meeting. They will move us forward to solve the problem".
3. **A personal note** can be very meaningful. Keep a pack of note cards in your desk for convenience. Another option is to send an email. Here's some ideas related to personal notes:
 - a) Include a fun poem, inspirational quote or silly picture to illustrate your point

- b) Include three things you appreciate about the person, so they know you have noticed what they contribute to the team
 - c) When someone has done something to help in an emergency situation, give a note reading, "Thank you. You are a lifesaver!" and attach a roll of Lifesavers
4. **Share feedback from others** - Tell your employees about positive comments that you hear from others. Also, share these with the rest of the team through email, by posting them on the lunch room bulletin boards, at departmental meetings or at the Monthly Celebration. This recognizes the individual's contribution and encourages others to exhibit similar behaviour. When sharing these comments with others, consider the style of the individual to determine if public recognition will be appreciated or not.
 5. **Recognize individuals or teams accomplishments publically.** This is often meaningful for the recipient (if they are someone who is motivated by public recognition - not everyone is) and can be a source of inspiration for others. Announce employees' achievements in departmental meetings, the Monthly Celebration, through email, on the lunch room bulletin boards, or other public venues.
 6. **Acknowledge life events** such as birthdays, work anniversaries, new babies, weddings, and others. Gone are the days when work and the rest of life remain separate and people want to know that you know and care about what's going on with them.
 7. **Food is important.**
Bring food in to meetings! (i.e. muffins or cookies) Reward individual or team achievements with a box of chocolates or other favourite food item.
 8. **Organize celebrations** at the end of a project, after an especially busy time or when an individual or team has reached a milestone.
 9. **Get out of the office.** Have a team meeting outside the office at the local coffee shop or restaurant.
 10. **Time off** - Our team works hard. Sometimes that means extra hours and other times it means extra effort. Time off is a good way to say thank you. Depending on the accomplishment and the interest of the individual, you could consider giving someone a day off, half day off, extend their lunch break or give them an hour off.
 11. **Flexibility** - Where possible, consider changing someone's shift to accommodate something going on in their life. Also, while it doesn't work in all positions, allowing someone to work from home for part or all of a day, is definitely a perk for some.
 12. **Giving special assignments** - Recognize highly-skilled employees or those that have shown initiative by giving them increased responsibility that will develop new skills, which may be helpful for advancement. Also, consider giving them the choice of the next project/assignment to work on. Another option is to ask these individuals to be mentors or trainers for new employees. Be sure to clearly communicate to the rest of the team why this person has been given these additional responsibilities so there is a clear linkage between positive behaviours/actions and positive outcomes.

13. **Contests.** Use contests to motivate the team to work towards a specific goal. Be sure to have prizes that are meaningful for the individuals and teams to ensure this will be considered recognition.
14. **Gifts** - Sometimes a verbal thank you just doesn't cut it. When an employee has done something truly extraordinary, find a thoughtful gift that they will appreciate. Also, consider having a recognition box in your department/office.
15. **Create a homemade funny trophy** that is appropriate to what is being recognized.
16. **Put up large calendar where accomplishments can be posted.** Call it the celebration calendar and use Post-Its and written notes of recognition tacked onto specific dates to honour contributions made by team members.
17. **Volunteer to do an employee's least favourite task.**
18. **Let an employee park in your parking space for a week.**
19. **Create a yearbook for your team** with pictures and stories of accomplishments during the year.
20. **Put together a scrapbook of memories** for an employee who is celebrating a milestone. Give each person on the team a blank page to fill out with stories or pictures of their experiences with that employee. Then, after the public recognition moment, the individual has not only a treasured award from the company but something from her co-workers that captures their feelings.