



Recognition is Critical

ISTOCK/DRAZEN ZIGIC



BY JOHN TSCHOHL

I recently asked a friend how often, during her career, she had been complimented or recognized for her work. Her response? “Not often enough.”

Unfortunately, that is true for most employees. I wonder why that is. I have some ideas that I’ll share with you here. The first is denial. Most managers and supervisors think, “I pay Charlie a lot of money to do what he does for the company. Why would I also have to praise him and recognize him for doing what I pay him to do?”

That fact is that money will get employees through the doors of your business, but it won’t keep them there. What will? Recognition. Praise. Feeling valued. Let’s face it, most managers and supervisors have had no training in how to effectively recognize employees. Many were simply promoted to their positions without being provided the training necessary to interact with — and motivate — employees.

I’ve found that the most intelligent people often are the worst when it comes to soft skills. They have a hard time getting out

of their own heads and verbalizing what they need others to hear. They don’t realize that you can’t take employees for granted. You have to let them know you value them and what they do for you.

In order to be effective, recognition must be genuine, specific, sincere, and timely. It’s not enough to recognize employees and their contributions to the company once a year during their performance reviews. It’s also not enough to simply say, “Alice, you did a great job.” Tell her what job you are referring to, be specific about what she did that impressed you, and let her know how proud you are of her and her work.

It’s also important that you recognize employees in front of their coworkers. Doing so not only increases the pride those employees feel at being singled out and complimented, it motivates other employees to do well and also be recognized.

You can take that a step further and recognize employees in front of customers. For example, you’re walking the floor and notice Allan assisting a customer. You might stop, introduce yourself to the

customer, and say, “Allan is one of our best employees. I know he’ll do a great job in taking care of you.”

One of the great things about using recognition as a motivator is that it doesn’t cost you anything. In fact, it actually saves you money by reducing employee turnover and the costs associated with hiring and training new employees to replace the ones you lost.

If you want to give someone a raise, you have to get approval from others to do so. But, if you want to recognize them, it costs nothing so no approval is necessary. You are free to reward employees with your words and build a team that works well together and that will drive your business. If an NFL coach doesn’t motivate his players to work together as a team and win games, that coach will be fired.

My research shows that, given a choice of \$100 or a complimentary note written on a manager’s personal stationery, most employees will choose the note. Why? Because, once they spend that \$100, it’s gone. But a handwritten note is personal and lasting. I have a friend who has

saved such notes over the course of her career. She keeps them in a file and reads through them once a year to remind herself that what she does is appreciated.

Now, I must say this: There are some employees who simply cannot be motivated, no matter what you do. Although they physically show up every day, they have mentally left you. Ford Motor Company announced a few months ago that it is giving its white-collar employees, who have been identified as underperformers, the option to leave and take a severance package or enroll in a performance enhancement program. Employees who choose the enhancement program but whose performance doesn’t improve will be terminated with no severance package.

Ford Motor Company realizes what too many companies don’t: If you’ve tried everything you can to recognize and motivate employees — and nothing changes — cut your losses, and let them go. ✓

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