



The Power of Recognition

Published on June 14, 2016



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Make no mistake, an organisation that fosters an environment that motivates employees and rewards positive behaviours will attract the best talent, maintain a strong, positive culture and retain the rockstars that outperform the competition.

Whether you're in, a football team, the boardroom or, the bedroom, the same rules apply. If you want someone to consistently perform to the best of their abilities, the environment has to be conducive to success.

In the workplace however, the value of recognition is often overlooked. Leaders are so focussed on the end result they ignore the value of praise, while others haven't been exposed to an environment of continuous recognition . In this case, anyone new to the business may not get the support they need to excel.

At [EmployeeConnect](#), we believe that building a fully engaged, energised team is the key to business success. In fact, this notion is based on one powerful premise - **what gets recognised gets repeated.**

When someone goes that extra mile, we praise them.

When someone helps us complete a task, we thank them.

When someone lives and breathes our company values, we celebrate them.

And guess what...they do it again.

An argument strongly backed

Studies have shown that if you recognise and appreciate your co-workers, great things will happen. While occurrences of stress, absence and turnover decrease, business leaders can expect rises in morale, productivity and competitiveness.

Research from behavioural economics and psychology has determined that employee recognition is the second most powerful source of employee satisfaction - only behind personal achievements in the workplace. In fact, recognition is ranked higher than internal promotions and the job itself. This principle has been demonstrated over and over again, in both laboratory and research settings, as well as in the real world.

Likewise, in the classroom, positively reinforcing behaviour through recognition will lead to increased attentiveness, improved test scores and most importantly, a genuine interest in learning.

Despite popular belief, money isn't the best way to recognise superior performance. In fact, research shows us that the number one reason why people leave jobs is "limited recognition and praise." Factors such as compensation were all deemed less important than recognition. Clearly, people value respect, appreciation and recognition just as much as and often more than monetary rewards.

At the end of the day, recognition increases employee satisfaction - it is as simple as that.

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Chemistry plays a big role in the phenomenon of recognition; it's a tug of war between two chemicals.

When we face criticism, rejection or fear - when we feel marginalised or minimised - our bodies produce higher levels of cortisol, a hormone that shuts down the thinking centre of our brains and activates conflict aversion and protection behaviours. We become more reactive and sensitive, often perceiving greater judgment and negativity than actually exists.

Surprisingly, these effects can last for more than 26 hours in some cases, imprinting the interaction on our memories and magnifying the impact it has on our future behaviour. Cortisol functions like a sustained-release tablet, the more we ruminate about our fear, the longer the impact.

Positive feedback assists the production of oxytocin, a feel-good hormone that elevates our ability to communicate, collaborate and trust others by activating networks in our prefrontal cortex.

It's all in the chemistry!

What happens in firms that don't recognise employees?

Companies that do not recognise employees for their productive habits and achievements often have lower earnings than similar companies that use smart recognition methods.

However, perhaps employers need to consider the repercussions of a disengaged workforce to truly understand the damaging effects a lack of recognition has on a company.

Typically, disengaged employees are directly affiliated with:

- Increased turnover rates
- Decreased employee empowerment
- Unsatisfying performance results
- Poor team culture

Many of the issues that business leaders face is usually a function of employee disengagement. While some senior management figures might consider this a lost cause,





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Recognition is the best and simplest form of feedback and for those who get it right, there are many advantages.

Why is feedback important?

Every behavioural economist and psychologist will tell you that the best way to make people work efficiently is to flood the brain with reward dopamine and oxytocin.

This is backed up by years of research that suggests the specific region of the brain responsible for processing feedback, the basal ganglia, is more open and receptive to positive feedback, with a large area dedicated to receiving this type of stimulus.

These findings add weight to the argument that, simply put, the human brain is physically wired to better absorb positive than negative feedback. This can be applied to just about any area of life, including the performance feedback and leadership development.

Paying workers based on their output is one way to trigger the reward system, but recognising accomplishments, noble deeds, and life events is also effective. Essentially, positive feedback helps workers learn habits that drives the company forward

As such, here are a number of benefits of employee recognition:

1. Increase employee engagement and motivation

If you know many people who work at large corporations with poor employee recognition methods, you may have heard comments like 'I feel like just a number', or 'My boss doesn't even know my name'.

These soul-draining work environments exist because there is minimal communication within the corporation. Employees in these organisations may only have friendly conversations with a few co-workers since their managers only give demands, not praise.

On the other side of the spectrum, firms that recognise employees often have happier work environments. The employees at these companies are also more likely to be optimistic when they work and communicate with people at higher levels of the corporate ladder. It is important to note that increased employee engagement can also reduce stress and stress-related health problems among the workforce.

2. Improve retention

Just as the business aim is to maximise profits, many workers in today's markets strive





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careers. By creating a positive work environment that serves the emotional needs of employees, you can discourage individuals from leaving your company to work for firms that offer slightly higher wages. This will also allow you to build a strong company culture of loyalty.

3. Be attractive to millennial workers

The newest workers in the labour markets are millennials. For millennials, recognition is not a simple preference; it is an expectation. Many workers from this generation avoid corporate jobs out of fear that their individuality will be removed as they earn their wage in a cube farm.

To retain (or even attract) millennial workers, you need to create a work environment that encourages individuality. This setting must also reward personal accomplishments. In fact, by recognising millennial workers when credit is due, you will surely gain the respect of the world's fastest growing labour force segment. Since millennials also happen to be the generation with the most education and formal training, you will be securing valuable human capital for your company's future.

Creating a framework for recognition

Now that you understand the importance of recognising employees for their productivity and accomplishments, you need to create a plan. It would be counterproductive to recognise employees for accomplishing minor tasks, so it is wise to compile a list of situations that warrant recognition.

These may include:

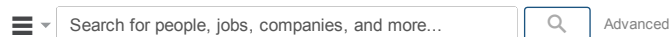
1. Living and breathing the company values

For employees to become aligned with company values, they must be communicated in such a way that each and every employee understands how the company's values relate to their daily activities. The best way to achieve this is to recognise when they demonstrate the behaviours associated with those values. As a result, abstract ideas become concrete—employees learn what values are important to management and how they relate to their job.

2. Powerful attitude

People that consistently come to the office with an optimistic outlook improve the environment for other workers. This positive behaviour can improve productivity, so you have a strong incentive to recognise employees that exhibit regular optimism. You may also wish to recognise leaders for holding the company together.

3. Productivity and skills



projects completed on or before due date. This will encourage the same excellent work in the future.

If a worker becomes proficient in a new language or learns a skill, for example, you should also let them know that their efforts are appreciated. Workers that strive to improve themselves are valuable to any company and you will benefit from making them feel comfortable at their workplace.

It is also a good idea to recognise employees for:

- Milestones and birthdays
- Extraordinary life events
- Actions that add value to the company

Tips for recognition

To recognise employees successfully, you should use a method that encourages workers

to congratulate their peers for their accomplishments. If your company uses an online chat system for each department, this may be an ideal place to recognise employees. The manager can send the message to the entire department, and co-workers can briefly offer words of encouragement.

Alternatively, recognition can be given during a meeting at a physical location. Before you give praise to an employee, ensure that he or she is expecting to be recognised; introverts may not appreciate being recognised in a public setting. You should also recognise workers soon after their accomplishments. If too much time has elapsed, the workers will not associate the recognition with their good behaviours or feel the gesture is too late.

You should also make sure that you are recognising employees consistently. If an employee is recognised for a behaviour on a certain week, workers that meet those same standards on the following weeks should also be rewarded. For employee recognition to increase productivity, it must also be consistent. Managers should always be authentic when they commend their workers; workers will not feel appreciated if they believe that the praise is a ploy to boost productivity.

An added benefit of recognition is that it affects more than just the recipient. When a coach recognises a player for improving their play, not only does the player feel proud about the praise, but the coach also celebrates in the joy of accomplishment and feeling of pride. When a manager recognises a co-worker, the employee is proud, but so is the manager to have that person on their team. Recognition as it is given or received has been shown to be an act of empowerment. Others on the team or in the room are also inspired, and they strive to be recognised and to praise others.




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make recognition a top priority

By making someone proud, you can show that you appreciate the work they perform, respect them for it and recognise their accomplishments. Appreciation and recognition are powerful motivators leading to an increase in performance, productivity, morale, employee retention and overall satisfaction.

Praise should come from the heart and actually mean something for both parties. From the employer perspective, applying appreciation and recognition needs to be deserved and then sincere in delivery as employees can easily gauge the motive. On the other side of the coin, employees need to be able to absorb praise well and ensure that this drives their performance moving forward.

In essence, recognition is an art and a science. It can't be forced, manufactured or stiff - business leaders simply need to make it a organic and natural behaviour embedded in the company culture.

Ari Kopoulos is CEO at [EmployeeConnect](#)

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