

Before moving ahead with a recognition program – Is your workplace ready?

For recognition to be most effective and sustainable, certain elements need to exist in your workplace:

- ★ Supportive work environment
- ★ Communication
- ★ Trust and Respect
- ★ Opportunities for Growth

Is Your Work Environment Safe and Supportive?

The physical and social environment of a workplace influences whether or not an employee feels valued. Do employees have the resources and supports needed to do their work? Is the work environment safe? Are employees encouraged to share ideas? Do employees have positive relationships with their supervisors? Is there a sense of teamwork and camaraderie? Is the workplace respectful of the diversity of employees? Analyzing employee survey results for your department from 2004 – 2006, will provide insight into some of these questions.

(www.gov.ns.ca/psc/survey)

“Conditions of the work environment are not necessarily seen as recognition by employees, but poor conditions are perceived as a lack of recognition of their value to the organization. Managers can affect the spirit of the work environment by working with employees collaboratively to find solutions within limited budgets and by providing employees with feedback and encouragement. Anything that tells people that they are valued and important has inherent recognition”.¹

Departments need to get the “basics” right - meet employees basic workplace needs in order for recognition activities to be most effective and sustainable.

Communication

Managers and supervisors can motivate employees by helping them recognize how their job contributes to the organization’s success and more broadly – the public good. It is important for employees to know what their purpose is in achieving work unit, department and organizational goals. “As an employee, knowing what you’re expected to achieve and what your department or organization as a whole hopes to achieve is very motivating. Purpose is a powerful motivator.”¹ Managers/supervisors have an opportunity through the **Performance Management** system to make the connections between individual and team performance and the achievement of business goals, and to provide employees with meaningful and constructive feedback.

“Studies have shown that employees prefer to receive information from their supervisors. They like to get the big picture information from the organization’s leaders and they want to hear the impact on their work-group directly from the people to whom they report.”² The preference is also to receive this information face to face. Employees need to know that their manager is aware of and appreciates their daily efforts. Refer to Communication Nova Scotia’s publication “**It’s Not Rocket Science**” for more information on the importance and value of communication in the workplace. (www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/rocketscience)

Communication between managers and employees plays an integral role in recognizing an individual’s worth within the organization. This in turn affects the overall delivery of service and success of the organization. Communication can take several different forms:

- ★ providing employees with feedback about their work
- ★ listening to employees by providing them with opportunities to provide input

¹ Ventrice, Cindy. “*Make Their Day! Employee Recognition That Works*”. San Francisco. Berret-Koehler Publishers Inc. 2003.

² Province of Nova Scotia. *Internal Communications: It’s Not Rocket Science*. 2006.

- ★ communicating business goals, objectives and priorities and helping employees see their role in achieving those goals (government and department business plans, corporate HR plan, corporate and department values, etc.)
- ★ opening the channels of communication by being accessible to employees
- ★ providing honest answers
- ★ providing employees with the information they need to do their job well²

Trust

Recognition is most effective when employees trust and respect their leaders, managers and colleagues. An employee needs to have trust and respect in the individual giving them recognition in order for it to be meaningful.

Trust and respect between managers and employees is essential. Research shows that the employer-manager relationship is a major factor influencing whether an employee stays or leaves an organization. Employees tend to put their best foot forward when the relationship between them and their manager is strong.³ This relationship is strengthened when managers show they are accessible to their staff, provide flexible work hours, provide their employees with access to the information they need to do their job well, and provide them with some autonomy to make decisions on their own.

Another way managers can strengthen the trust between them and their staff is by actively acknowledging and communicating process short-comings, or concerns identified in employee surveys and other evaluation tools. To build trust with employees, managers need to acknowledge that some problems exist and demonstrate to their staff that efforts are being made to improve.¹

A 2000 Gallup Organization study found that the length of an employee's tenure at a company is largely determined by the employee's relationship with his or her immediate supervisor. Gallup Management Journal, March 15, 1999. <http://gmj.gallup.com>

Opportunities for Growth

Providing employees with opportunities for training and career development motivates them and tells them they are valued. "Employees want to know that they are valued for who they are and what they do. One way to do this is by paying close attention to what employees need and then helping them meet those needs. Providing opportunities for growth, development and learning through training, coaching, feedback, new challenges and development opportunities can do this."¹

In general, employees want to learn new jobs and skills, keep their job exciting and dynamic and improve their marketability for career advancement within the organization. By taking the time to listen to employees and learning about employee needs and career goals, managers can demonstrate recognition by offering employees:

- ★ a lead role on a new initiative
- ★ participation on a special project team

³ *Winning Strategies for a Global Workforce. Attracting, Retaining and Engaging Employees for Competitive Advantage. Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study - Executive Report, January 2006*

⁴ *Bob Nelson, Nelson Motivation Inc., <http://www.nelson-motivation.com/resources.cfm>*

- ★ the opportunity to present to senior leaders or at an external venue
- ★ the opportunity to mentor a new employee
- ★ a venue for sharing information with their work unit on a course recently attended
- ★ registration in a course that complements their work



Everyone has some role to play in ensuring that a supportive work environment exists, that communication is effective, that trust is fostered and maintained among colleagues and that opportunities for learning and career development are available and used. Managers and supervisors however are in the best position to make these things happen and to ensure that the workplace is ready to support recognition programs and activities.

An effective and sustainable recognition program supports the organization's business goals and values and promotes a work environment where managers clearly understand the impact of their actions on employees' behaviours, managers are deliberate about the behaviours and performance they recognize, and where employees feel valued and appreciated for their contributions.⁴