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**BOB NELSON, Ph.D.**

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By Dr. Bob Nelson, PhD.,

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## Implementing & Leveraging Recognition for Greatest Impact

### *The Individual Level*

The most powerful type of recognition occurs at the individual level, one-on-one. All managers need to take personal responsibility to see that they recognize their employees, and they need to keep at it on a regular basis. The best way to do this is to plan for it.

When planning individual recognition, a good (and simple) approach is to use the what, who, when, where, and how format. This planning format doesn't even need to be written down, but systematically thinking it through will help you.

1. *What do I want to recognize?* As mentioned, the best recognition is contingent; that is, in response to a specific behavior or performance.
2. *Who do I want to recognize?* Identify the person or people most responsible for the desired behavior or performance.
3. *When should the recognition be done?* The best recognition takes place soon after the desired behavior or performance.
4. *Where should recognition be done?* The best recognition is personal; that is, delivered directly to the individual being acknowledged – ideally, in person.
5. *How should the recognition be done?* The best recognition is done in a way that enhances its motivational value to the recipient. Who performs the recognition? Is it done in public or in private? Asking yourself these questions will help make sure that the recognition activity has the greatest impact.

***Recognition Techniques for Immediate Application***

Take a few moments at the end of the day to reflect on whose performance you've noticed. Write those individuals thank-you notes and leave the notes by their workstations as you leave.

Manage by wandering around. Get out of your office to see, meet, and speak with employees about work that they are doing. Take different routes in and out of the premises.

When you read your mail, look for positive items to share with others or at all-department meetings.

Greet individual employees by name and with eye contact. Take a few minutes to see how they are doing. Be sincere.

Make an effort to meet with employees you don't see or speak with very often. Take a break together, have coffee or an off-site lunch.

Act on good news! Catch people doing something right and thank them for it.

Take time to listen when employees need to talk. Be responsive to people, not just to problems.

Take time at the beginning or end of meetings to share positive news such as letters from customers or ask if there are any praisesings from one team member to another.

Remember the 4:1 rule! Every time you criticize or correct someone, plan to praise or thank that same person at least four times.

Think of mistakes as opportunities for learning. Help employees learn from their mistakes, don't criticize employees for making mistakes – especially not in front of others.

Be quick to thank and compliment others and slow to criticize and judge them.

Spread positive gossip! Tell others what you are pleased about and who is responsible.

Praise publicly; reprimand privately.

Take time to celebrate individual or group milestones, desired behavior, and achievements!

***Other Low-Cost Recognition Strategies***

Here's a list of low-cost ideas that I have collected from companies over the years:

Personal thanks

Thank-you notes

Email praise

Voice-mail praise

Public praise

Pass-around trophy

Time with manager, president

Car wash by manager or executive of choice

Employee parking space

Read positive letters from customers at staff meetings

Referenced in company newsletters

Featured in community newspaper

Name days in employee's honor

Wall of fame – photos of achievers

Team projects scrapbook in company lobby

Certificate of appreciation

Balloons and computer banners

Pack lunch for employee

Loan your car to employee

Create an award (Golden Banana, Spirit of Fred, Order of the Extended Neck, etc.)

Time off (extra break, long lunch, 3-day weekend, etc.)

Do a least-favored or menial task for someone else (“Dump a Dog” program)

Victory celebration

Performance passes to use a lending library for books & audios

Coupons to bring employee’s pet to work

Feature in company ads

Confetti committee for spontaneous celebrations

Baking cookies, distributing candy, making ice-cream floats

Cook and serve meal (barbeque, breakfast, etc.)

Management challenge (if goal is met, manager shaves head, dresses in a crazy outfit, etc.)

### *Additional Guidelines for Rewarding Individuals*

A few other considerations can help your recognition be even more on the mark:

#### **MATCH THE REWARD TO THE PERSON.**

Have one-on-one conversations with each of your employees to find out the type of praise they prefer, and to determine how to deliver it in a way that would not provoke jealousy in your department. This is about personal, daily awareness – the annual service awards banquet is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Does the employee prefer recognition in private, public, or either? Will a thank you do? Does he enjoy the times when his peers are aware of good performance? How about occasional on-the-spot candy, free lunch, certificate for ice cream, small gift, etc.? Find out what works for individual employees. Establish an action plan that fits the needs of individual employees rather than trying to fit all employees into one big category.

#### **MATCH THE REWARD TO THE ACHIEVEMENT.**

Tap into your leaders to recognize deserving employees, for example, awarding lunch with the director. Do larger forms of recognition for greater achievements, but remember to do the fun, simple things as well. For example, every couple of months have some members of your leadership staff wheel around a cart of treats to each employee in your office. Ideas include a variety of ice-cream bars/popsicles; granola bars/candy bars; doughnuts/pastries; and so on. Make it fun by doing something goofy (if you serve ice-cream bars, cut out the pictures of them on the box and tape them to your back so employees know what varieties they have to choose from). This is sure to get some laughs and feelings of recognition/togetherness in your department, not to mention the interaction they are getting with leadership.

#### **MATCH THE REWARD TO YOUR BUDGET.**

Recognize that you can do a *lot* of recognition with little or no budget, such as public recognition in a format like Energizers; having thank-you cards on hand for employees to use to recognize one another; a monthly recognition program such as employee of the month (have your staff vote on who they feel is most deserving).

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