



## UNIT-12 Employee Recognition

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Define who employees are
- ✓ State why employees should be recognized
- ✓ Develop a program for employee recognition
- ✓ Implement and measure an employee recognition program

## Unit 12

### Employee Recognition

#### Employees

#### Who are your employees?

This may seem like an obvious question with an even more obvious answer, but it's not that simple. With the changing make-up of the work world, in the form of virtual teams, contractors, interns, and so on, it is now harder to pin down who works for whom.

#### Workers

This is a no-brainer. These are the rank-and-file members of the staff who are neither management nor supervisors and are on the regular payroll.

#### Managers/supervisors

This is a bit of a gray area. Sure, managers and supervisors are part of the team – every team needs leaders – but they are often the ones responsible for employee recognition. Do they recognize themselves?

It basically boils down to this, they can recognize their employees and their successes, but to recognize and reward themselves would be counterproductive. What kind of message would that send to the employees?

Recognition at this level must come from above. Managers can recognize supervisors that are below them, but at the management level they must look to their superiors if they want a nod for a job well done.

#### Interns/contractors

Interns are with your company to learn, gain experience, build up their resume, and get a good reference or two. They are not just free labor to be exploited, regardless of what some unscrupulous employers might think.

They can be recognized in various ways: by treating them as part of the team, by giving them interesting projects to work on with good guidance and feedback, by singling them out for praise and encouragement when appropriate.

If your company can afford it, pay the intern as you would a regular entry-level employee. If it's not in the budget for a regular paycheck, at least reward the intern with a financial bonus at the end of their term.

When the internship comes to an end, give the intern a good reference if they've earned it. That will go a long way toward recognition and should help them with their career.

Contractors are another case. They are employees in a sense, but temporary ones. They are important, however, and should be recognized if they do a good job, just as any other employee. That's not to say they should be showered with gifts and bonuses, but making sure you tell the contractor you are happy with their work and giving them additional contracts, is good recognition. Referring business partners to the contractor is another form of

recognition that that contractor can see as recognition.

With contractors, one big way of recognizing them is to pay them on time, at the agreed upon rate, and including any performance bonuses, if applicable.

### Couriers/suppliers

Here, the line between who is, and isn't, an employee is much clearer. Couriers and suppliers aren't.

That doesn't mean they aren't vital to your business, of course they are. But they shouldn't be treated the same as an employee that is a pivotal part of your company.

A simple thank you can go a long way toward recognition. Cards at Christmas time (with maybe a little bonus tucked inside) are a nice gesture. Even simple things like getting to know your courier's or supplier's names, if they are regulars, can add that human touch of recognition and make them feel appreciated.

### Remote workers/virtual teams

These workers are definitely your employees, they just happen to be in a different location and it's important to keep them in mind in terms of recognition. In fact, it's a good idea to make a special effort to recognize them because they may feel separated from the culture and camaraderie of the workplace due to the very nature of their geographical separation. These teams will be addressed in greater depth later in this session.

### Can employee recognition be used as a recruitment tool?

The job market is competitive when you are selective in who you hire. Every edge needs to be taken when searching for the right candidate to fill a vacancy at your business. If you want more than just a warm body to sit at a desk, then you've got to differentiate your business in some way to attract the top talent.

**Please consider these questions and answer them in the space provided below:**

- Do you fall into more than one group, is even possible in the workplace?
- Should some groups get more recognition, or less?
- Also, get them to see if they can come up with other categories of workers, etc. that should be included on the list.

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Perks are good, competitive salary is good, and developing a corporate culture that embraces workers and makes them feel wanted is even better. That's where employee recognition comes in.

Recognize your employees for good work and service, and keep on recognizing them. Have a formal recognition plan in place and make it part of your recruitment material when pursuing new employees. Encourage your current employees to talk to prospective ones and it's likely they will mention the recognition they receive if it's sincere. That in turn works as a recruiting tool in an informal sense, which is often the best one of all.

### Dangers, favoritism, costs

What are the dangers of employee recognition? You would think that such a thing wouldn't have any drawbacks, but yet it does. Imagine you're a worker who thinks that they should have been recognized for a particular task but weren't, or imagine that one worker always seems to be getting a pat on the back and you aren't. There might be valid reasons for not being recognized in these instances, but they can still lead to resentment.

Recognition needs to be fair to be effective. One worker can't be seen to be the favorite, the appearance of fairness in recognition is just as important as the recognition itself. Some employers shower one or two workers with recognition, praise, secret perks and bonuses, while treating others with disdain and lack of respect. Favoritism is a big danger in this case as eventually these things are found out, there are not many secrets in the workplace. Favoritism, even unintentional, can backfire with drastic consequences such as plummeting morale and effort.

Not all forms of recognition have costs. It costs nothing but a moment's time to stop at an employee's desk to say: "Good job on that report, thank you very much." Parties or awards or trips are more expensive forms of recognition, but they can be budgeted for, and in the long run they can save money through having a successful team that pushes your company ahead.

## Strategies for Virtual and Remote Team Success

Once the virtual team is established, there are a few things that you can do to ensure its success that will lead to the team members being in line for recognition, just as the local employees are.

### Hold a Kickoff Meeting

If at all possible, have the first team meeting in person. Complete some team-building activities and some social activities together. This is also the time to set ground rules, establish the team's goal, and set expectations.

### Build Relationships

It's all too easy for mobile workers to feel isolated, and for that isolation to turn into disengagement and chronic low morale. Help the team build relationships by:

- Engaging in small talk before and after a meeting
- Having meetings in person when possible
- Holding social events (in person or virtual)
- Making communication easy by providing instant messaging applications with video chat
- Creating social spaces for people to hang out in
- Relying on each other for information and help, and using you (as the team leader) as a last resort

### Manage Performance

Earlier, we talked about ways to manage performance and how important it is to be proactive with mobile workers. Make sure that you set, manage, and monitor expectations. Keep lines of communication open and let your team know that you're there to support them.

### Be Consistent

Being consistent is extremely important when leading a virtual team. If you usually respond to e-mails within a few minutes, for example, but leave one team member hanging for days, they might start to wonder if they've done something to upset you.

### Give Trust to Get Trust

Trust people to do the job that you've assigned them to do. Ensure that processes, resources, and tools are in place so that they can be successful and let them do their work. Trust them to reach out to you if they need help.

### Reward the Team

Rewards are important for traditional teams, and virtual teams are no exception. Reward them whenever you can, whether it's words of recognition, an extra day off, or a free lunch delivered to everyone on the team.

### Encourage Communication

One of the biggest challenges for a virtual team is communication. One way to make communication easier is to make sure that everyone is accessible via phone, e-mail, and instant messaging during working hours. You may want to have a contact sheet posted on your team's website with everyone's contact information, as well as the best time to contact them. (This is particularly important for teams spread out across different time zones).

Set a good example by checking in with everyone at least once a day, even if it's just to say hi or ask how their weekend was. Make sure that everyone knows that they are expected to be available during working hours. Address any attendance issues right away.

E-mail can help communication, but it can also hinder it. There's nothing worse than sitting at your computer and pressing the Receive button over and over, waiting for an important reply that you need to continue working. The easiest solution to this is to encourage people to use an alternate method of communication for important items, such as the telephone or chat.

You can also set expectations for communication response times. For example, many businesses dictate that a voice mail message must be answered within eight business hours. You can also set e-mail response times based on message priority, like this:

- Low importance: Answer within eight business hours
- Normal importance: Answer within four business hours
- High importance: Answer within one business hour

Another way to facilitate communication is to schedule it. For example, a communication schedule for a virtual customer care team might look like this:

- Daily: Update cases on the server as you complete work on them
- Weekly: Send report to manager with a summary of weekly metrics
- Bi-Weekly: Attend team meetings via video conference and report on any issues that need to be escalated
- Monthly: Attend individual meeting with manager via video conference to review performance

### Model the Way

Behave in a way that reflects the expectations that you've set. If you expect team members to be online by 9 a.m. and reply to e-mails within an hour, but you log on at 11 a.m. and take all day to answer their questions, you're sending the wrong message.

## Why do it?

### Why recognize your employees?

This is another question that should seem obvious on the face of it, but let's look a little deeper anyway. There are layers to the answer that we need to peel back to find a satisfactory reason why we should recognize our workforce.

### What is the benefit to employees?

Everybody likes to be recognized for their hard work and a job well done. If you get recognition, in one form or another, it gives a sense of satisfaction, a boost in morale, and usually the determination to keep on doing a good job. Being recognized for being a valuable employee shows that what you do matters and someone has noticed.

There are different forms of recognition, that's true, but at the end of the day some recognition is better than none. There's not much worse for an employee to have their only interactions with their supervisor when something goes wrong and blame is handed out. It can be even worse to be working in a vacuum with no interaction, or recognition at all. As empowering as being recognized for a good job is, not getting any kind of feedback or attention can be detrimental in the opposite extreme.

In short, an employee that hears "good job" or "thank you" or "take the rest of the day off" benefits by having a positive boost and confirmation that they are valued. Work is more than just a paycheck for most employees.

### What is the benefit to the company?

It costs a lot to find, recruit, and properly train employees and if they keep leaving in a cycle of failure, lack of recognition may be one reason why.

Employees that are happy in their jobs, thanks in part, at least, to recognition, are more likely to be good workers and remain in their positions. Creating a culture of recognition creates an atmosphere that workers want to remain in and want to do their best in which means your company benefits through productivity and solid customer service.

### What is the benefit to customers?

This is obviously closely related to the previous entry, but it bears separate discussion of its own. Your company is in business to service customers of some nature, whether they are direct customers coming in off the street, or customers that place an order remotely and are never seen by anyone in your company.

Regardless of who your customers are, they deserve to be treated with respect and efficiency and that's where employee recognition comes in. If your employees are treated that way themselves, they are encouraged to turn around and provide exceptional service to customers. The employee benefits, the customer benefits, and the company benefits.



## Appreciation

Depending on the culture of the organization, employees can often describe feeling unappreciated rather than being celebrated and appreciated. You may have even heard that tough-minded supervisor say, “Where I come from, the appreciation that you get for doing a good job is that you get to keep your job.” In today’s world, this simply does not work. People work best when they know that what they do matters to someone else, especially their boss!

Appreciation is more than performance. It may mean hanging in there when the going gets tough, like during a strike, or getting to work in a bad snowstorm, or during a busy season like Christmas. It may be doing some unrewarding job over and over, and still doing it well. Employees often appreciate having their pain recognized more than their performance.

Besides the ways your organization normally expresses appreciation, can you do something creative or even outrageous? (For example, “Hero of the hour” packs a lot more punch than “Employee of the month.”) And unless you have an employee who would be absolutely crushed by the attention, make the appreciation public.

### How can we show employees that we appreciate them?

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The Richard Ivey School of Business suggests that we put the ten C’s into practice.

- **Connect** with your employees. No matter what your position, take the time to speak with members of your staff individually.
- Give your employees the opportunity to advance their **career**. This means you should hold employees accountable, provide opportunities for learning and advancement, and ensure that people have meaningful and challenging work.
- Create a **clear** vision. People can’t follow you if they don’t know where you’re going!
- **Convey** your vision, your expectations, and feedback.
- **Congratulate** employees when they make a contribution or do something positive.
- Give employees a chance to **contribute** to the organization.
- Give employees **control** over their jobs as much as possible.
- Create a **collaborative** atmosphere. Teamwork is a great motivator, and research by the Gallup organization shows that having a best friend at work is one of the biggest engagers.
- Ensure your company is **credible** and has a good reputation.
- Create **confidence** in your employees and in your company.

**What do you do in your organization to foster engagement and recognition?**

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Where does recognition overlap just doing your job?

It's good to recognize employees, we've already established that, but getting recognized shouldn't be the only reason an employee does their job well. Pride in their performance, and a paycheck, should be motivation enough, getting recognized should be a secondary consideration, if at all. Formal recognition should be defined enough that employees know what the criteria are, while informal recognition should be more spontaneous and random.

If getting recognized is the only impetus some employees have for working hard, then perhaps the recognition program has to be reconsidered, perhaps the employee's tenure itself has to be reconsidered. Maybe the program is too good, maybe whatever forms the recognition takes is distracting and the whole program has become more of a contest, a reason to work hard, rather than an additional facet of the workplace.

If you find that happening, then it's time to have the recognition committee meet to rework the program and iron out any flaws that have developed over time.



## To Motivate or Instigate

Motivation is a tricky subject. As managers, we used to talk in terms that said the only way to get a person to do something was to make them want to do it in order to get something they want or avoid something they don't want. Pay them or punish them. This discussion included terms of managing people with a whip, a carrot, and a plant.

### The Carrot

This represents incentives and rewards. This could be time off, pay bonuses, or promotional gifts like jackets. One construction company found the best motivator for their crews was to give them Friday afternoon off if all their work was done and done well, and all their objectives had been met.

While this approach may work in some instances, it's been demonstrated that offering carrots often actually reduces productivity. You can see excellent descriptions of repeat experiments from a range of job types in Daniel H. Pink's book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

### The Whip

This represents threats and consequences. Although such techniques are often perceived negatively, they do have their place in the workplace for short-term goal achievement for the manager. In other words, employees never respond positively to this management style, but if the boss cracks the whip, they will get things done. Consequences for poor performance may include suspension and termination, of course, but those are big clubs and sometimes we just need a little stick. Smaller reactions might include no recognition, no promotions, or disciplinary interviews.

However, we must remember to recognize people when they do something good (and let's agree on something here: there is a lot more good work going on than there is poor work). If we continue to ignore people after their good work, our concept of consequences will backfire.

### The Plant

This represents a positive environment. It suggests many things a supervisor should strive for: employees knowing their work is important, an open atmosphere, fair dealings with all, training, good lines of communication, a feeling of support by the supervisor, and a feeling of self-esteem.

## What can a supervisor do to motivate others?

You may have heard about people who have a hobby and they are fantastic at it. Maybe they like to do carpentry, paint, write, or sculpt. You'll mention, "Wow, you are really good at that. You should do it for a living." And they'll say that doing what they love for money would take all the fun out of it. You might shake your head at them, but what they say is true, and once they lose the passion for it, their results will change.

In his book “Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us,” Daniel Pink examines the success of sharing through open source projects. He looks at some of the most successful tools around (such as Mozilla, Linux, and Wikipedia) which were all developed by people who were doing the work without being paid. He also looks at pay for performance incentives that gave measurably lower results.

For linear, predictable tasks, incentives can temporarily lead to greater production. However, when we are looking for more creative results, problem solving, or innovation, pay for performance typically backfires. If we pay people to donate blood, we get fewer donations. When we reward a lab monkey to solve puzzles, they solve fewer problems. When we reward children for drawing pictures, they draw less.

High levels of creativity result from tasks that we find interesting, challenging, and captivating. This includes things we often ask from our staff like problem solving, planning, thinking out of the box, and completing projects. Our task is to create a climate where internal motivation will activate their own performance. In order to be successful, supervisors need to know their staff, what motivates them, and how to create a climate that they find stimulating.

The truth is, we can’t motivate other people. Motivation is intrinsic (meaning it comes from within). However, what we can do is provide the right atmosphere for employees to identify their own motivations, link into them, and respond.

**What do you think is the right atmosphere? There is no real right answer to this question, as it depends on your workplace. However, this is a good time to start thinking about the environment that you want to create.**

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Either way solo, or group, recognition goes a long way to having your employees feel appreciated.

## The Nuts and Bolts

This is when the rubber hits the road, so to speak. This is when your company's employee recognition team crafts an effective program with criteria, schedule, and guidelines, and then puts the program into motion.

## The Framework

Just as you can't build a house without a solid framework, you can't implement an effective employee recognition program without having a good basis for moving forward.

Once your company has decided to put a program in place there are many questions that need to be answered. When is it going to begin? How are the employees going to be recognized? Who is going to be recognized? How often?

### When

There's nothing worse than deciding to put a program, any kind of program, in place and then rushing into it action before it's ready. This applies just as well to an employee recognition program. Don't announce it, and then miss a deadline, or worse yet, announce it and then leave employees waiting and waiting and waiting. This could have an adverse effect of diminishing morale. It could raise rumbles of 'They don't care enough to even bother going through with it.' You are much better off by finalizing everything, all details, and then moving ahead with the program.

That more or less covers implementing a formal recognition program. But what about an informal one? Informal recognition doesn't need a schedule, when an employee deserves recognition, then do it, don't wait. Give that person a sincere thank-you, a high five, or some other simple form of recognition. If their accomplishment merits formal recognition then do that as well, there's no such thing as too many thank-yous.

In some cases, managers may need some coaching on providing informal recognition. Make sure they know what your company is trying to achieve by recognizing employees and reiterate the many benefits of recognition. Stress how important it is and also that it doesn't have to be an overly dramatic show of affection or flashy.

### Schedule

A formal recognition plan should be carried out on a regular basis. You must decide whether it's an annual awards banquet, a quarterly event, or seasonal. Making that decision provides time in the schedule for selecting recipients and laying all the other groundwork for a celebration such as venue, gifts, catering, and so on.

A smaller, semi-formal recognition plan could be more fluid. For example, suppose your committee has decided to recognize workers for their service to the company. In this case, you could have one ceremony to honor workers for five years, 10 years, and so on. Or, you could recognize the workers for their respective company anniversaries as close to their anniversary dates as possible.

## How to implement a recognition program

Once your committee has decided on the when, it's time to move on to the how of implementation.

The best way to do this is to assign tasks and deadlines to the committee members. Build in some lag time for anything unforeseen to occur and go over all the details prior to announcing the program. That way when your company announces the program, there's no delay in implementation.

Give the program the splash it deserves by way of an announcement. If you can call all the employees together, physically or virtually. Rent a venue if you can and make an event of the announcement itself. That sends a message to the employees that the company is serious about the recognition program, and the party-like atmosphere will almost stand as a form of recognition itself. Who doesn't like a party?

Consider these points when announcing a recognition program:

- Criteria and guidelines
- Levels of recognition
- Announcements
- Forms of recognition

Let's expand upon these a bit more.

### Criteria and Guidelines

Make sure all employees know what it takes to earn recognition in the company, this isn't to foster a competition or contest between employees but ensures that no one has misconceptions about the program. Have committee members available for questions too, especially in the early days of the program when it's a new wrinkle in the workplace.

Make copies of any criteria and guidelines available to employees, either as a paper copy or on the company intranet. This is especially helpful if your program solicits nominations from workers.

Soliciting nominations from the workforce is often a good idea as it can highlight workers who may be overlooked in the grand scheme of things. A worker in the shipping department who is unfailingly helpful, accurate, punctual, and reliable could get bypassed because he's just a quiet guy who works the overnight shift. It's a nice compliment to have your workers say 'Hey, good job.'

If your company is going to welcome nominations from workers, make sure you have a nomination form available. It helps streamline and standardize the process so the nominator knows how to present the case for their co-worker. If it's a simple process, it is more likely to be used.



An employee who has just celebrated one year with the company shouldn't expect to be recognized in the same manner as the supervisor who marked 30 years with the firm. The employee whose idea saved the company \$100,000 per year might be upset to see the employee who keeps the break room clean feted the same way. This is where tailoring expectations, and making sure the program is completely announced and transparent pays off.

It's a good idea for long-service awards to break them down into significant increments. Have recognition for one year with the company, five years, 10, and so on. Step up the type of recognition at each level with perhaps a certificate for the first year, a silver pin for five years, gold pin for 10 years, etc.

### Announcements

You've had your flashy announcement to introduce the program to your employees, you've received some nominations and selected the nominees to be recognized, you've settled on long-service awards and have a venue booked for the ceremony. The next step is to let everyone know.

There are several ways to do this. A companywide email is a quick and easy way to get the word out. If your company has a regular newsletter be sure to include it there as well. Social media is standard for this type of announcement as well, it reinforces your company's image in the eyes of your customers, it shows you care. Send out a press release too, if you feel your employees are worthy of recognition, don't keep it a secret.

A fun way to announce the employees who are getting recognized is to come up with some whimsical announcement posters for company common spaces. These are often good for a laugh.

In these announcements, make sure all employees know they are invited and ask for RSVPs. This is another important planning step to keep preparations in line with the number of attendees.

### Forms of Recognition

This is where a recognition program can get a bit tricky. Some people love to be singled out for praise while others shun the spotlight at all costs. But all employees should be eligible for recognition, even the most reticent introvert. In that case, the program will have to be tailored for them, inclusiveness can be a form of recognition and shouldn't be disregarded. Don't force an employee to cross a stage to receive an award they are deserving of, but would desperately rather get quietly and in a low-key manner.

Is the recognition going to be monetary, time off, or an actual physical gift? There are merits to each option and this is another instance where setting prior guidelines pays off.

If your company is going with the physical gift option, create a list or catalogue of choices to choose from. That way the employee gets something they want, for those that would prefer money, offer the value of the gift in cash form. If someone wants time off, that can be worked out as well.



### Further Reading:

- Ventrice, Cindy. *Make Their Day! Employee Recognition That Works*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2nd Edition. 2009
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- Marciano, Paul L. *Carrots and Sticks Don't Work: Build a Culture of Employee Engagement with the Principles of RESPECT*. McGraw-Hill Education; 1st edition. 2010.