



REWARDS

Results of a recent survey by the Council of Communication Management confirm what almost every employee already knows: that recognition for a job well done is the top motivator of employee performance.

Yet most managers do not understand or use the potential power of recognition and rewards. This is true even though 33 percent of managers themselves report that they would rather work in an organization where they could receive better recognition.

When a manager is apprised of the importance of this fundamental principle of human behavior, the typical reaction is to insist that employees would appreciate only rewards and forms of recognition that directly translate to their pocketbook—raises or promotions.

While money is important to employees, what tends to *motivate* them to perform—and to perform at higher levels—is the thoughtful, personal kind of recognition that signifies true appreciation for a job well done. Numerous studies have confirmed this. The motivation is all the stronger if the form of recognition creates a story the employee can tell to family, friends and associates for years to come.

Let's discuss informal rewards and recognition. "Informal" here means more spontaneous. As for the distinction between rewards and recognition, Aubrey Daniels, a leading authority on performance management, explains it best: "You reinforce behaviors and reward results."

"Informal Rewards," focuses on manager-initiated, performance-based rewards. The guidelines for effectively rewarding and recognizing employees are simple:

- 1. Match the reward to the person.** Start with the individual's personal preferences; reward him or her in ways he or she truly finds rewarding. Such rewards may be personal or official, informal or formal, public or private, and may take the shape of gifts or activities. Janis Allen, performance management consultant and author of *I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are*, advocates having people who work for you complete a "reinforcer survey" of things they like, and suggests that you do one for yourself as well. Since preferred reinforcers differ from person to person, composing such lists is the best way to make sure your actions are as effective as they can be. Having employees initial items they like in this book is another way of determining what motivates them.
- 2. Match the reward to the achievement.** Effective reinforcement should be customized to take into account the significance of the achievement. An employee who completes a two-year project should be rewarded in a more substantial way than one who simply does a favor for you. The reward should be a function of the amount of time you have to plan and execute it and the money you have to spend.

3. Be timely and specific. To be effective, rewards need to be given as soon as possible after the desired behavior or achievement. Rewards that come weeks or months later do little to motivate employees to repeat their actions. You should always say why the reward is being given—that is, provide a context for the achievement. Once you have consistently rewarded desired performance, your pattern of recognition may become more intermittent as the desired behavior becomes habitual with employees. Here is a good rule of thumb: For every four informal rewards (e.g., a thank-you), there should be a more formal acknowledgment (e.g., a day off from work), and for every four of those, there should be a still more formal reward (e.g., a plaque or formal praise at a company meeting), leading ultimately to such rewards as raises, promotions and special assignments.

Catherine Meek, president of Meek and Associates, Los Angeles compensation consultants, offers guidelines to make reward and recognition programs effective:

- The programs should reflect the company's values and business strategy.
- Employees should participate in the development and execution of the programs.
- The programs can involve cash, non-cash or both.
- Since what is meaningful to you may not be meaningful to someone else, the programs should encompass variety.
- The programs should be highly public.
- The programs have a short life span and must be changed frequently.

In addition, Aubrey Daniels recommends that leaders be held accountable for effectively recognizing employees and that organizations avoid using blanket or "silver bullet" approaches to motivation. "Jelly bean" motivation—giving the same reward to every member of the organization—not only does not inspire employees to excel, but it may actually damage performance as top achievers see no acknowledgment of the exceptional job they have done.

Source: Nelson, Bob, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*. New York