

Starting a recognition program is a course on motivation

BY TIM MORAWETZ

THE ARRIVAL of the year 2000 offers a fresh start for dealing with the continuing challenges of motivating, rewarding and recognizing your people.

Whether you're starting a formal program or reviewing an existing recognition program the following checklist will help you make sure all angles are covered.

Knowing your goal

Some of the objectives a program can help fulfill include:

- increased individual productivity or job performance;
- higher-quality customer service/support;
- improved cost management;
- better teamwork;
- higher employee satisfaction and retention;
- alignment with company mission, vision, values; and
- strengthened corporate culture in times of growth or merger.

A strong program can help drive more subtle attributes, such as personal leadership, cooperation and innovation.

In fact, the existence of an effective program may help you recruit the best candidates for new positions.

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Survey staff

A good program is based on a firm understanding of an organization's workforce.

You may discover problems unrelated to the reward and recognition program that are holding people back from improving performance.

Conduct informal focus groups led by a professional moderator — not a company employee. If you're lucky, you might get some good recognition ideas and business solutions as well.

Define your target audience

While some initiatives will apply to everyone, others may be

aimed at head-office or factory staff only. Although it's challenging to execute, your program will be stronger and more credible if it includes all staff from management personnel to part-time workers.

Find the right mix of reward and recognition

Tangible prizes often come to mind first as means of encouraging performance. For example, rewards are important markers of achievement, particularly for workers (like salespeople) who already track their performance and are goal-oriented.

Recognition provides a "softer" form of praise that's publicly visible. It plays to an individual's pride and sense of involvement with a company. People who might never see themselves "winning the trip" will never forget their moment in the spotlight.

How long should a program last?

A program's duration should match the time involved in achieving your goal. If your goal is ongoing (e.g., strengthening customer service), a continuing program is likely re-

quired. If you need to build morale after a tough few months, a one-time activity may suffice.

Performance criteria

With some employees, the scope of their job performance is quite defined, while others are very hard to pin down. Employees' key result areas can provide a useful start. Sometimes, you may choose a broader definition of performance, especially with different areas of the workforce or seasonal business priorities. Once you've settled on performance criteria, be sure to explain them clearly for all to understand.

How to measure and judge performance

You shouldn't expect to create a perfect, quantifiable measurement system, nor should your people. The goal here is to provide a relatively easy, fair and visible process for selecting the individuals and teams to be rewarded or recognized.

The first option, quantitative measurement, may not suit many job positions, and does not reflect the quality of the in-

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dividual's efforts (such as interactions with others). A qualitative approach may be better and more flexible, where performance is judged by others.

Every employee should understand how the program measures performance. This reduces any charges of favoritism and enhances overall credibility.

Involve a range of people when judging performance. Instead of expecting managers to

know everyone warranting consideration, encourage employees to nominate one another, or themselves. This increases involvement. The final judging panel should include a range of managers from across the business, and perhaps several employees.

Points programs

Points are certainly better than cash rewards, which are quickly spent. With points, winners can select their own reward,

and continue earning points to redeem larger and more valuable rewards — a good way to appreciate long-serving employees.

While flexible and widely appealing, point systems require considerable set-up and administration. A simpler approach is to let winners choose from several different rewards of roughly equivalent value.

Do you need lots of levels?

Yes, if you wish to recognize many people for smaller achievements, plus provide a prestigious celebration for a select few. Keep the first level relatively attainable, so more people can get a taste.

A team award category is usually important, and can lead to some productive rivalry.

What types of rewards work best?

As an alternative to traditional catalogue prizes (from pens to microwaves), consider more unusual and unexpected 'lifestyle' rewards, such as fresh flowers every week, photography lessons, or babysitting vouchers. Another option is work-related training courses or seminars.

Does it feel like you?

An effective R&R program is always in sync with the organization's values and standards. If it doesn't feel like you, it prob-

ably won't be embraced by employees.

Management support crucial

Senior managers should understand and embrace the program. The CEO should present the top honours.

Communication

Without communication a recognition program investment may go to waste. Communicate the program's benefits and mechanics to all potential participants. Motivate and train front-line managers separately, prior to the main launch, so they can champion it to their people.

Once you're up and running, effective communication helps sustain the program. Use recognition to the fullest by profiling individual and team winners — with a description of their achievements — in e-mails, newsletters, posters, and on your intranet site.

How you gauge the effectiveness of your program should relate to its initial objectives. This could range from sales numbers, to customer satisfaction surveys, to employee surveys or even employee retention rates. Don't expect a perfect measurement.

A well-crafted reward and recognition initiative takes effort and commitment, but should pay off in a more engaged, effective and loyal workforce.

Recognition options

Memorable rewards

- Unique experiences (adventure trip)
- Recharge the batteries (vacation)
- Get out more (babysitting/restaurant vouchers)
- Looking great (drycleaning/housecleaning vouchers)
 - Pampering (weekly fresh flowers/massage)
 - Hobbies (photography/cooking lessons)
- Professional growth (training courses/seminars)

Recognition with impact

Profile individual/team successes using:

- Personal note from the CEO
- Newsletters/intranet site
 - Awards events
- Spontaneous gestures: "Take the afternoon off"
 - Special business cards
 - On-going mentoring

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