

Acknowledge Your People's Endeavors

by Patrick J. McKenna

It seems sad, almost tragic, that so many people's efforts and accomplishments go unrecognized. Think about the last time someone you worked closely with on an important project took the time to tell you how much he or she admired your expertise, respected your decisions, or had confidence in the way you handled something. How did the expression of that recognition affect you on an emotional level? Your answer may be all the argument you need to appreciate the importance of giving recognition.

Invariably we ensnare ourselves in the trap of looking for problems to be fixed rather than seeing successes needing to be multiplied. Focusing obsessively on problems, especially in this time of economic challenge, encourages everyone to be risk averse and cautious. It does little to encourage success, especially at the vital task of regularly innovating slightly new ways to do the job better.

So what should we do? Giving recognition is important. If you know that doing it is likely to feel awkward, here are a few suggestions:

Decide what actions are worth of recognition. Be alert for opportunities to provide recognition whenever you observe someone:

- supporting the efforts of some other member of the department
- learning new skills
- investing time to research new developments affecting your organization
- sharing information and knowledge with others in a clear and timely manner
- analyzing work flow processes to simplify systems
- taking initiative to solve a problem
- accomplishing more than they promised they would.

Do it sparingly. Telling a colleague that you really appreciated the way they handled a specific project is not something that has to be done too frequently. In fact, if you do it too often, it can lose its potency. It can seem insincere or even manipulative. So just do it when you feel the circumstances warrant.

Determine the appropriate method and form for extending your recognition. I have become increasingly convinced that we do a lousy job at recognizing people's contributions. Those few that are exceptional, use every method they can dream of to communicate sincere appreciation for specific aspects of a task well done. Here are just a few no cost-to-low cost ideas and examples, that I have stolen from those few that excel at this:

- Visit a colleagues in their offices just to thank them for some specific contribution or post a thank-you note on your colleagues office door.

- Send an e-mail message to everyone in the group advising of a colleagues' personal contribution to your own accomplishment.
- Present a stuffed "Energizer bunny" to that group member who keeps going and going; or a stuffed roadrunner to those who manage to complete a particular rush project in record time.
- Initiate your own internal one-page monthly newsletter. Arrange a "Bravo" column to salute personal and professional activities or a "Good Tries" column to recognize and offer encouragement to those whose initiative did not achieve their full potential.
- Create an annual report, yearbook, or photo album containing memorabilia and photographs of every department member along with their best achievements of the year.
- Send flowers to the spouse of any department member who has to be away from home for an extended period on business, to show appreciation for the sacrifice.

Consider that each member of your legal department is different and therefore, you must deal with each individual in a manner that fits with their personal style.

Observe the professionals you work with and consider what would motivate each of them.

- Will he or she respond well to your giving them recognition in front of the others – or would a one-on-one conversation, a voice-mail message, or memo make them more comfortable?
- Will your verbal recognition be enough – or should you also provide some more tangible and alternative form of (non-monetary) appreciation?
- What other methods and forms of (non-monetary) recognition do you have at your disposal – considering the specific individuals interests, leisure pursuits and career development needs?

The form of recognition you offer may be as simple and cost-free as a thank-you note placed on an individual's office desk or as modest as a gift certificate for dinner. If you have done your homework you will be able to offer something that appeals to the individual you are recognizing.

Prepare an "Annual Accomplishments" report for your department. It could include a collection of statistical summaries, war-stories, improvement charts, lessons learned, specific accomplishments, and the like. This could very well become a source of enormous energy, pride, and surprise to everyone in your department.

Our performance results are determined by what we finish, not by what we start. Failing to periodically take the time to review and assess our progress is one of the major reasons why so many improvement efforts lose their way. Without the essential component of celebration, individual learning, energy, and momentum dwindle.

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