

Understanding recognition

A mindset. An experience. A culture.

John O'Brien,
Vice President,
Employee
Performance
Group,
BI WORLDWIDE

How do you define recognition?

If the word “program” comes to mind, it’s time to start thinking differently. Recognition today has no start or end date and it’s moved way beyond the perfunctory handshake and pen-and-pencil set given after 25 years of service.

How do we define recognition for the 21st century?

It’s a mindset.

An experience.

A culture.

Understanding the multifaceted character of recognition is a vital first step toward integrating it into your organization — and enjoying its profound effect on your employees, customers and bottom line for years to come.

Think about it.

Recognition is a mindset and anyone can develop it. It just takes thought and focus. As a manager, you first need to determine what’s worthy of recognition at your organization.

Ask yourself:

- Which behaviors should be recognized?
- How do these behaviors reflect and advance our company’s mission and values?
- How can I communicate these behaviors to my team?

Communicate the why.

Linking desired behaviors to your company’s mission and values is vital to the development of a company-wide recognition mindset. When you share concrete reasons for recognizing an employee, you elevate its significance and eliminate any potential “popularity contest” perceptions. You want everyone to see how specific behaviors can have an impact on a larger scale and to really understand how they can make a difference. When this happens, your employees will set their minds to earning recognition for all the right reasons.

Make it a habit.

The more often you recognize your employees, the quicker it will become second nature to you. Put the word “recognize” on your calendar every week and see how it becomes a natural part of your routine. When your days get busy, recognition can easily migrate to the back burner. A recognition mindset won’t allow that to happen.

Recognition becomes an experience when it’s...

- Specific
- Timely
- Sincere



Understanding recognition

A mindset. An experience. A culture.

Success is in the details.

You've noticed a recognition-worthy behavior. Should you:

- a. Deliver a vague compliment as you pass in the hallway?
- b. Deliver a well-thought-out "thank you" that recognizes the specific behavior, explains its significance and praises the recipient's effort and talent?

Which scenario would **you** remember? Which would motivate **you** to repeat the behavior?

Recognition doesn't have to be formal. It doesn't have to take a lot of time. But the more specific it is, the more lasting — and rewarding — its effect is.

Look and listen.

Recognition opportunities are everywhere but you need to keep your eyes and ears open. Be on the lookout for employees who might have:

- Come in early or stayed late to finish a big project, talk to a customer or help a teammate
- Volunteered for a project or covered for a coworker who was sick or overloaded
- Gone out of his/her way to boost morale or create a positive, inclusive work environment
- Went above and beyond (took on more responsibility, did the least desirable task) in a long-term collaborative project

Seize the day.

The most effective recognition is timely. Waiting to deliver well-deserved praise makes it seem insincere. No one wants to be treated as an afterthought. Communicate your approval immediately and you'll magnify its meaning.

Make it personal.

A recent BI WORLDWIDE engagement study showed that employees who were "confident that their good work would be recognized" strongly agree that they will go to great lengths for customers. And those who had received "incredible" recognition in their job felt a strong obligation to "work as hard as I can for my company."

Good stuff, right? Consistent and incredible recognition lead to increased employee effort and customer satisfaction. You know what it means to be consistent. But what does "incredible" recognition really mean?

Big or small, recognition is incredible when it's **personal**.

As a manager, this means you need to do your homework. Learn the names and job functions of each team member. Even better, spend time learning firsthand about each individual's interests, strengths, challenges and aspirations. And if this isn't possible, make sure it's on the to-do list of all of your managers.

Understanding recognition

A mindset. An experience. A culture.

Yes, it takes time. Yes, it takes effort. Yes, it's worth it.

Words are powerful. And words that engage emotions on a personal level are exponentially powerful. Remember when you were a kid and you were praised by an adult (other than a parent) for something you did? Maybe you shared your lunch or defended a friend or volunteered to do something no one else would do.

The personal recognition made you feel great. And it helped shape you into the person you are today — your values, your work ethic, your sense of self.

Now think about how personal, individualized recognition can help shape your employees into their best selves. They gain confidence and pride. You gain valuable, competent, long-term associates.

A culture of recognition? Yep, we've got that. Done.

Not so fast.

Building a culture of recognition is a **process**. Remember: no beginning and end dates. When the mindset of recognition has permeated your company, for management and employees alike, and when recognition experiences happen consistently and frequently — you're on your way.

Be creative.

A culture of recognition needs to grow along with your goals and objectives. Keep it fresh by thinking about different behaviors, reasons and ways to recognize. Ask for feedback from everyone. In today's multigenerational workforce, the gathering of ideas is especially valuable. Meaningful recognition for a Baby Boomer will no doubt be quite different from meaningful recognition for a Millennial — and you need to know the difference.

Check it.

Are the same people always being rewarded? A culture of recognition must be inclusive so be sure to consider the quiet, more introverted people behind the scenes. They may not be in positions that are highly visible to the rest of the organization but they still deserve to be recognized for their hard work.

Be consistent.

Does the recognition level at your company move up and down? Don't let busyness or stress stand in the way of delivering well-deserved kudos. That's the time when recognition is needed most. Strive to recognize consistently throughout the year.

Cycle of success.

In a culture of recognition, one good thing leads to another:

- Improved job satisfaction leads to increased employee engagement
- Increased employee engagement leads to increased retention of employees

a culture

Understanding recognition

A mindset. An experience. A culture.

- Increased retention leads to increased customer satisfaction
- Increased customer satisfaction leads to increased productivity
- Increased productivity leads to higher profits¹

And that's not all. Word will get around. Your reputation as a great company to work for will grow and spread, allowing you to attract top talent for years to come — great recognition indeed.

To learn more about how BI WORLDWIDE can help, visit:
BIWORLDWIDE.com or email LATAM@BIWORLDWIDE.com.



¹ Creating a Culture of Recognition. (March 2014). *Engaged HR*.
Retrieved from: <http://engagedhr.com/creating-a-culture-of-recognition/>