

Top 5 Employee Recognition Myths

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Employee recognition programs have been around for decades – long enough for traditional practices to become antiquated when tested against the diversity of generations, genders, roles and personalities at work today.

When used as an engagement strategy, recognition has transformed into more than a service anniversary award or formal, annual event. In the new environment of 'easy-come, easy-go' employment, busting these top five recognition myths will give you a competitive advantage for acquiring, growing and retaining your talented employees.

#5 Not for Salespeople

Are salespeople included in your employee recognition program? If so, what does your data show about their participation levels – both in giving and in receiving recognition?

Many people believe that salespeople are “coin operated” and therefore only motivated by their ability to earn more money. In fact, salespeople are usually eligible for many incentives throughout a year, which gives them opportunities to cash in. Unfortunately, actual results of these incentives tell a different story – most salespeople do not perform better if the carrot is just more cash.

Equally detrimental, internal employees know that salespeople have these incentives and often view them with a bit of discontent. It creates a dichotomy of “us” (the employees who believe they don't get many opportunities to earn) versus “them” (salespeople who get money “thrown at them”). Worst case scenario is an unwillingness to work together – employees who don't understand the impact they have on the success of a sale and salespeople who take the work employees do for granted.

Why settle for that?

To bridge the gap, salespeople should be included in the employee recognition program. To do so, however, we have to view salespeople as people, not vehicles that will do more work if you input more fuel.

As people, they need to be recognised for more than just achieving a year-end number, and there are many activities to choose from:

- Training achievements and outcomes
- Demonstrated core values
- Sales process adherence and improvement
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Documentation and database compliance or timeliness
- Submitting best practices and success stories
- Lead follow-up and referrals



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Many of these examples involve collaboration, feedback or input from non-sales employees. As part of that holistic team, give employees an opportunity to recognise behaviours that drive everyone forward. Educate them on how a sale impacts their work life, and empower them to thank and encourage salespeople to keep putting forth their best efforts.

Likewise, salespeople who understand how their internal teams impact their success can use recognition to great effect.

An interesting study in a workplace with a direct sales force compared the number of recognitions given by salespeople to their sales target achievement. In this organisation, salespeople relied on subject matter experts to help them close deals, so they were heavily dependent on non-sales employees for their success. Not surprisingly, the study showed that those who gave large amounts of recognition also had higher target achievement percentages.

Win-win!

Using recognition is a no-cost way to create relationships between sales and non-sales employees, and a strong team is the best foundation for winning and keeping clients.

Recognising salespeople for more than just quarterly or year-end sales achievement provides motivation to those who don't always land in the top 10 percent – and it's these people who make up the biggest segment of your sales team. If recognition can inspire each of them to bring in one more sale, that will have a huge impact on your business.

Top sales achievers thrive on recognition. They're usually performing at peak capacity, so they may not have a lot of incremental effort to give you. However, they're the ones who all your competitors want to poach – so recognition should be one of your primary retention strategies.

Given all the benefits, can you think of any reason they shouldn't be included in your employee recognition program?

#4 Should Only Be Given by Managers

Do you find that the majority of recognition you receive is given by your **peers**, or by your **manager**?

For many, recognition is viewed as something that must be given from the **top down**. Giving from the top down is important; after all, it sets an example for the rest of the organisation. More than that, top-down recognition also demonstrates the appropriate ways and whys to recognise each other.

Interestingly, recognition in many organisations stops there. Leaders and managers do a fantastic job of recognising employees, but **metrics show that peer-to-peer recognition falls far short of benchmarks**. In fact, we're seeing near 100% manager participation while only about half of employees are giving recognition.



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Often, managers can give a gift or tangible award when they send recognition. They have a budget and can issue it at their discretion. Of course, this makes the recognition an employee receives really exciting! **Dangerously**, it can teach employees that the only meaningful recognition is a one in which they get something – so many believe that an employee who just sends a recognition has no impact.

To battle this perception, it's important for managers to send recognition that does not include awards. Best practice is for managers to give three "non-award" recognitions for everyone they send that includes a gift. Why?

1. This continues to **role-model** the right behaviours. When employees see that leaders value recognitions which do not include awards, they will adopt that mindset as well.
2. It increases the **quantity** of recognition. Managers aren't limited to giving recognition only so long as their budget lasts. More people will get recognised for more activities.
3. It increases the **frequency** of recognition. Rather than waiting for a significant act that is appropriate for a gift, managers can recognise in smaller increments: demonstrating values, making progress, taking initiative – all of which may lead to significance down the line, but recognition in the meantime provides the encouragement to keep going.

That really is the heart of the matter – **frequency of recognition**. As good as managers are, they're usually outnumbered by their employees at about 7 to 1. Logistically, it can be difficult for a manager to know about every time each employee contributes something great. For peers, there's a different story. Working on the "front lines" together, we're much more aware of the daily effort, support and initiatives that take place. While you could wait for a manager to recognise your peer, it's going to **help you build relationships** and your **personal success** if you own recognition activity too.

Building a culture of recognition – while often starting at the top – is only truly effective in the long term if **every employee embraces** the importance of acknowledging the great work around them. For program stakeholders, it's a good idea to evaluate your participation and see if employees could use a boost in their peer-to-peer activity.

#3 Only within Your Own Team

If you get a "thank you" from someone outside of your immediate team, is it *more, less or just as* memorable as one from someone on your team?

Sometimes it feels like there is an imaginary line that can't be crossed when it comes to recognition. You're allowed to be generous when giving accolades within your team, but you should get someone's permission before venturing outside of it. You don't want to bother anybody,

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make anyone uncomfortable, or put the spotlight on someone who might not want it. All are totally valid concerns, but there is some upside to consider as well:

- Recognising that colleague will bring positive attention to the good work they do.
- They may not be getting recognition within their own team.
- Recognition from outside their team is often more memorable - making a bigger long-term impact.
- You are building a bigger network and stronger relationships that may be beneficial to your future.

The imaginary line is almost always just that - imaginary. If it costs the organisation nothing, and it encourages repeated positive behaviours, most managers see it as “the more, the merrier.” In fact, it often gives them insights into the kind of work their staff are doing and the impact it has on the company at large.

What about those people who are very private and just don't want to call attention to themselves? The best thing to do is just ask them. If you have a feeling people don't want that kind of fanfare, it's best to find out so that your recognition doesn't backfire. But, that doesn't mean don't recognise them! Many online recognition systems allow the giver to mark the recognition as “private” so that it doesn't get shared with other users. Similarly, these systems also allow each individual to choose their own privacy settings - changing their user profile to “private” so that it doesn't appear on the recognition wall or other social media tools.

It's definitely easier to recognise someone on your own team - you are much more aware of their accomplishments and extra effort - and it can be difficult to know about someone in another part of the business that deserves recognition. But, because recognition from outside the team is typically less frequent, it stands out from the norm. Anything that stands out is naturally more memorable. Test it for yourself: have you received a “thank you” from someone outside of your immediate team?

#2 Only for “Above and Beyond” Performance

For many people, recognition is a bit too “touchy-feely.” And, unless someone does something completely out-of-this-world, they aren't comfortable giving it.

For others, they just don't think about giving recognition as an “everyday” occurrence. Our hectic schedules, deadlines and multitasking make it hard to grab a few minutes to give someone a nod.

However difficult it may be, due to comfort level or time, recognising the small stuff actually makes a huge impact. It can change attitudes, reinforce behaviours you want to be repeated, and help people realise how much their actions affect their peers. It also builds relationships and creates a better working environment.

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No, it isn't every day that someone goes above and beyond; but hardly a day goes by when there aren't several people who lent a hand in some way.

So what will happen if you recognised eight “regular” people this week?

1. Their quality of work will increase.
2. Their speed of work will increase.
3. They'll anticipate your needs.
4. They'll be more confident about their work.
5. They'll be motivated to get recognised again.
6. They'll be more team-oriented.
7. They'll repeat that behaviour.
8. Other people will want to get recognised too.
9. Their perception of you will change.
10. They'll find a reason to recognise you.

And what would happen if a bunch of “regular” people were recognised consistently?

1. Behaviours would turn into habits.
2. Habits will improve performance.
3. Improved performance will create “above and beyond” actions.
4. Above and beyond actions create a successful culture.

Why wouldn't you want to be involved in a culture like that? Well, for those that still need convincing, imagine that you don't recognise “regular” people. Instead, you recognise two “above and beyond” people this quarter. For the people that you work most closely with on a daily basis, you might find that:

1. They feel unappreciated, and they may be vocal about it.
2. They aren't likely to give extra effort because they believe no one notices.
3. They are only willing to do exactly what's in their job description.
4. They see no point in trying because of the “above and beyond” performer always gets the accolades.
5. They can't be bothered with your priorities.
6. When you need a favour, they are literally not around to ask for help.

How much would you like to work in that organisation? We spend most of our adult lives at work, so most of us would rather feel appreciated, positive and successful while we're there.

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#1 Top Performers Only!

Want to build a culture of high performance? Break out of the mindset that only top performers should get recognised.

There are still organisations that want to focus all their recognition efforts on their top 20%. This group definitely needs (craves) recognition for their efforts, but you'll find that focusing on a retention strategy for them will cost you less and still provide the motivation they need.

You'll see the greatest impact by creating several promotions that give every person an **opportunity to be acknowledged** for demonstrating the right behaviours. While not all people will achieve the highest level of accolades, the large majority can be motivated to increase over their current performance levels – delivering incremental activity that drives you towards success.

In behavioural economics terms, this is called the “**dopamine effect**” – that is, the “rush” we feel after something good happens. It's a chemical reaction in the brain, and each time it happens, it feels so good that we want it to happen again.

Acknowledgment – **rewards and recognition** – are the little “rushes” that initiate that chemical reaction. It makes us feel good about what we're doing, so we learn that we'll feel good if we do it again.

This results in a high-performance formula.

Many great recognition promotions are low cost or no cost; as long as everyone can participate, you'll see how quickly they make a difference!

To learn more about how BI WORLDWIDE can help you implement results-based recognition in your organisation, visit BIWORLDWIDE.com.au or email enquiries@au.biworldwide.com.

