



The Principles and Practices  
of a Facilitative Leader

## The Art and Joy of Celebration

### Establishing a Recognition Program

*"The greatest need of every human being is for appreciation." --William James*

Employees need to feel valued and appreciated. When employees give their lives to an organization, they feel part of a team and family. They spend more time with their work team than perhaps many other relationships in their lives. Recognizing the contributions employees make to an organization helps solidify these relationships and fosters employee loyalty to the organization. We are all creatures that have a basic need to feel valued and loved. This is why incorporating employee recognition into an organization's strategic plan process is so important.

#### Why Is Employee Recognition Scarce?

Time is an often-stated reason and admittedly, employee recognition does take time. Employers also start out with all of the best intentions when they seek to recognize employee performance. But, they often find their recognition efforts turn into employee complaining, jealousy, and dissatisfaction. With these experiences, many employers are hesitant to provide employee recognition.

Employee recognition is often scarce because of a combination of several factors. People don't know how to provide employee recognition effectively, so they have bad experiences when they do. They assume that **one size fits all** when they provide employee recognition. Finally, employers think too narrowly about what people will find rewarding and recognizing.

#### Ways to Recognize Employees

Prioritize employee recognition and you can ensure a positive, productive, innovative organizational climate. Provide employee recognition and celebrations to encourage more of the actions and thinking that you believe will make your organization successful. People

who feel appreciated are more positive about themselves and their ability to contribute. People with positive self-esteem are potentially your best employees. These beliefs about employee recognition are common among employers even if not commonly carried out.

## **Identify What is Important to the Employee**

When doing employee recognition, it is important to find out what is important to the employee. It's amazing how we think we know what would be really cool for someone else and then come to find out it is not as important as we thought. Some employees may value a day off with family or a preferred parking space. Others may value a dinner gift certificate, a home improvement store gift or a mall gift certificate. The ideas are endless but the key is to find out what is important to that employee and targeting a recognition gift that would be important to them.

## **Two Types of Recognition**

### **Informal Recognition**

Spontaneous recognition is also important. The closer recognition comes to a task, the more the employee will associate that recognition to the desired behavior. These kinds of recognition can be as simple as walking by an employee, observing a desired behavior and commenting on how much you appreciate it. These informal moments are invaluable and provide a lot of important fuel for an employee's desire to do a good job.

### **Formal Recognition**

Part of the challenge of recognizing employees is making it a priority, stopping to think about it and doing it on a regular basis. Creating a structure for formal employee recognition is important and can help ensure employees get recognized despite the inevitable challenges of day-to-day responsibilities. This can be as simple as making a certain month of the year a month that employee contributions are recognized or as formal as an employee of the month program or employee of the year celebrations.

## Recognition Program Guidelines

*"People know what you expect by what you inspect and what you respect"*

1. Recognize the behavior. Be specific in telling the individual(s) why they are receiving the recognition.
2. Be able to identify clearly the impact the behavior has on the group, program, product and etc.
3. The "reward" should be valued by the person getting it.
4. Sincerity is the one of major keys to the success of any recognition program. It doesn't matter WHAT, it matters THAT
  - a. You noticed
  - b. You care
  - c. You are aware
5. The more immediate, the greater the perceived value. If you want to reinforce something special, the sooner and closer to the behavior, the fresher your response and the greater the possibility of the behavior continuing.
6. Be selective – Recognizing one or two people increase their self-esteem. It also serves as a model to others as it reinforces your own values. Handing out "blanket awards" - or trying to "find something for everyone" only serves to devalue the purpose of recognition.
7. Reinforce accomplishment and progress toward an objective or goal. Look for ways to acknowledge people's efforts. Catch people doing something right!
8. Be thoughtful in deciding where, when and how to acknowledge someone. Some of us bask in public recognition; others would prefer a quieter, more personal approach. Look for specific tangibles that exemplify the behavior.
9. Celebrate failures - we all learn by our mistakes. In making them a genuine celebration, we create a culture that encourages risk taking and learning from our errors.
10. Commemorate events both great and small.

## 75 Specific Ideas – School Staff Recognition

*“Grace yourself with a gift of an attitude of gratitude.”*

1. Host a "Thank You Breakfast" during Teacher Appreciation Week, or during another time of the year when they least expect and most need it.
2. Send a Note. Mail it to the person's home address. Sending it home allows them to not only be surprised, but it takes the celebration beyond the school doors.
3. Recognize special contributions by putting "Cookie Coupons" in teachers' mailboxes. Arrange with the cafeteria for teachers to redeem those coupons for a special treat.
4. Whenever you are able, send a personally written -- preferably, handwritten -- note of thanks or appreciation to teachers "caught" caring or who pulled off terrific classroom projects. Send at least a dozen of those notes each week. Keep a copy for the teacher's file; later in the school year you will be able to draw on those positive moments as you compose teachers' evaluations.
5. Plan to take over a class for a special read-aloud time that will give teachers an extra break. You might read a favorite book and do a follow-up activity; or you might make special arrangements with a teacher to read something connected to the classroom curriculum. Besides offering a brief mental-health break for teachers, this is a great way for principals to get to know students and for students to see the principal in a different light.
6. Create a certificate. Make it creative, fun and personalized. Find a unique contribution that makes the certificate special.
7. Provide healthy food in the morning -- for no special reason at all other than to say "Thank you."
8. Be on the lookout for special gifts that relate to teachers' special interests. Dollar stores and other budget outlets can be great places to find those kinds of things--for example, a small birdhouse for a teacher who loves birding, a picture frame for a teacher with school-age children, a book of crossword puzzles for the puzzle fan on your staff.
9. Take a teacher's duty as a reward for a special contribution.
10. Call for a "Jeans Day." All teachers can dress down on that day. Or make this a special reward for teachers who have gone above-and-beyond; have stickers printed that say "I earned this Jeans Day." They can wear the sticker on whatever "Jeans Day" they choose.
11. Offer school perks. Such as; free class coverage, leave school early cards, permission to skip a meeting, reserved parking space in the front of the school.
12. Design your own "trophies." These objects can be humorous and visible forms of recognition. They can be used to celebrate products, processes and relationships.



13. At each faculty meeting, hold a lottery drawing for a "free" two-hour break during which time you will cover a teacher's class. The break can be redeemed at any time, but it needs to be arranged at least a week in advance.
14. Give gift certificates to teachers who have perfect attendance each quarter. You might offer choices such as a certificate for a manicure, a movie, or a dinner.
15. Each month, hold a party to recognize staff members who will celebrate birthdays that month.
16. Provide a duty-free week during scheduled state-test times. Arrange to have PTA parents or others cover those duties.
17. Establish a bulletin board on which to spotlight a different teacher(s) each month.
18. Plan a "Pamper Day." Set aside a space and bring in a nail technician to do teachers' nails or to give hand massages with hot lotions. Put out scented potpourri, the silver punchbowl, and special cookies. Play relaxing music. Arrange to have each teacher's class covered for 30 minutes so they can visit the Pamper Room.
19. Meet outside of school over lunch with teachers of each grade level or with teaching teams. Provide coverage so you can have a few laughs and get to learn more about the teachers and their concerns.
20. Start an "Encouraging Words" chain. Use a computer to design and print special cards, or purchase card stock and attach a small apple sticker to each card. The principal will begin the chain by sending the first five cards to five deserving faculty members. The next week, the principal places a blank "Encouraging Words" card in the mailbox of each teacher who received one the week before. Each of those teachers sends an "Encouraging Words" card to another of their colleagues. And the cycle continues Include the entire staff.
21. Purchase fresh flowers for teachers' desks during parent-teacher conference week.
22. Offer to baby-sit a teacher's child while that teacher does some special, above-and-beyond activity for students or the school.
23. Put in teachers' mailboxes your personal list of "Twenty-Five Things That Make [Your School Name] Great!"
24. Show your appreciation by reminding teachers -- in your newsletter, a staff meeting, or a personal note -- that you know where the real work in the school goes on, and that it is *not* in the office!
25. In your public address announcements remind students to show appreciation for their teachers in all kinds of ways. Creating a special card of appreciation is just one of those ways.
26. Make staff members feel special and professional by purchasing business cards for them. If such a purchase is not in your budget, enlist the support of your art and technology teachers to use school computers to design and print cards.
27. Take a teacher out to lunch to recognize a special day -- for example, a birthday or a special honor or award.
28. Praise teachers often in staff and parent newsletters. Keep a record of those notes of praise to be sure you are spreading around the recognition; and add to teachers' official files a copy of newsletters in which they are recognized.

29. Give teachers extra release time to observe another teacher in your school or a nearby school. Arrange coverage of the teacher's class to enable the release time. This is a win-win for everybody; teachers really appreciate being treated as professionals *and* they pick up new ideas and skills.
30. For a reasonable cost, you can purchase "From the Desk of" notepads or sticky notes for teachers.
31. Put attractive pop-up tissue boxes in teachers' mailboxes just before the opening day of school and two or three other times during the year.
32. Host a staff breakfast early in the school year. Use this as an opportunity to make the breakfasts a monthly treat by signing up grade levels to plan future feasts.
33. Learn what teachers want or need that they do not have and approach local businesses about providing those things.
34. Provide copying services for teachers. Arrange for parents and others to do the mundane task of copying so long as teachers provide three days' advance notice and instructions about how many copies will be needed and any special requests (for example, requests for copying on colored paper or two-sided printing).
35. Provide each teacher with a coffee mug that has his or her name on it.
36. Warehouse stores and teacher catalogs have great buys on school supplies when they are purchased in bulk. At the midyear point you might stash in teachers' mailboxes a new supply of crayons from "The Crayon Fairy" (or another in-demand supply from an appropriately named fairy).
37. Order a 6-foot long sandwich and have it delivered to the faculty lounge.
38. At the end of each grading period -- when teachers have spent hours agonizing over student performance -- send special notes of appreciation.
39. Cover a teacher's class so he or she can attend to a medical or family issue -- for example, a doctor's appointment, seeing their own child perform at another school's holiday concert, or spending a couple hours with a parent to help them transition from a hospital to a nursing facility.
40. If you have lost part of your school vacation to snow days, provide some special treats on those makeup days to recognize the extra stress that goes with losing valuable R&R time or planning days.
41. Ask for volunteers for a committee -- which will include you, of course -- that will take responsibility for planning special activities to build morale all year long.
42. If it starts snowing a couple hours before school lets out, go outside and scrape or brush off teachers' cars so they can get on the road soon after the bell rings.
43. Provide dinner between school and an evening PTA meeting.
44. Recognize a teacher who has gone above and beyond by putting in his or her mailbox a voucher for a free cup of tea at Starbucks or another local spot.
45. Start every in-service gathering with a special snack. Perhaps you and your assistant principal might even cook up a special brunch or lunch to kick off the event.

46. Purchase a special book for the school library to recognize a teacher or honor a special occasion (for example, a retirement, a 20th teaching anniversary, or the completion of a master's degree). You might even give the teacher the choice of what book to purchase. Include inside the book a special bookplate to commemorate the teacher, the landmark occasion, and the date.
47. Ask parents to donate theater or sports tickets they cannot use. Announce in your staff newsletter a drawing for those tickets; interested faculty members can enter their names.
48. Encourage individuals or teams of teachers to present at conferences. Provide the funding to support those efforts, which will motivate teachers and bring recognition to your school.
49. Keep the candy jar in the staff lounge full of chocolate and/or hard candy.
50. Offer a once-a-month "theme week" in the faculty lounge. Decorate the lounge appropriately and provide a related treat. For example, on October 16 you might recognize the birthday of Noah Webster -- of *Webster's Dictionary* renown -- by serving homemade alphabet soup and presenting teachers with a new set of dictionaries or grade-appropriate dictionary/vocabulary skills work sheets that they can use with their students. And use a thesaurus to help turn the wall of the teacher's room into a word wall, featuring dozens of superlative word cards that describe your staff.
51. To recognize the start of spring, add fresh flowers to the teacher's room and provide each teacher with a flowering plant to brighten his or her desk. Serve up a snack of spring rolls -- homemade, or ordered hot from a local Chinese restaurant -- to accompany lunch.
52. The faculty room is not getting the attention it needs? Arrange for "gremlins" to clean it up!
53. Offer a sweet reward -- a candy bar or an ice-cream cone coupon -- for teachers who complete surveys before the deadline. Or let them select a treat from a basket in your office when they turn in the form; in that way, the fastest responders are guaranteed the best treats.
54. Include special prize offers to the first teachers to respond to special postings in the weekly newsletters. (Knowing there are occasional hidden surprises in those newsletters is a way to be sure they get read!)
55. Enlist the office staff to help you solicit gifts or coupons for teachers from local merchants such as restaurants, florists, and auto service providers. Use those special gifts as incentives for a variety of tasks.
56. At each faculty meeting, or any other time, hold a random drawing for a "lunch of the month." On a specific day, those teachers will get to order-in from the restaurant-of-choice's menu.
57. Post on a bulletin or white board in the faculty area a weekly trivia question. Provide small prizes, and announce the trivia answers and winners in your staff bulletin each week.
58. Host a "Welcome Back to School Luncheon."
59. Share a great Web resource in each edition of your staff newsletter. That resource might be a site that offers great ideas tied to an upcoming holiday or a site that focuses on stress busters or teacher humor.
60. Get into every classroom every day -- or at least two or three times a week. That personal contact goes a long way in letting your staff know where your priorities are.
61. Provide each teacher with a rose on Open House night.