

Employee Recognition Best Practices

“A Guide for Employees and Managers”



Why recognize?

Every time one of us succeeds at something – anything – our nerve cells release a chemical called dopamine, which stimulates the reward centre of our brain. It feels good!

When you recognize a peer, it produces a double-dopamine rush: doing the behaviour feels great – and being recognized for it does, too.

Want to get a co-worker aligned with your priorities? See their work habits change? Or turn around their attitude? Consistent recognition for the good things they do will get them craving that feel-good feeling. Before you know it, they're one of your best teammates!

It takes two...

Let's talk about another reason to recognize your peers: relationships. Unless you work in a closet with no electricity, Wi-Fi or phone, you rely on people to get your job done. And, if you want to accomplish more than just your job – like become successful – you need to build great relationships.

The foundation of relationships is respect and appreciation. Recognition can help you grow that foundation. You'll make connections, demonstrate how you treat people and certainly make lasting impressions.

Give before you get...

For those non-touchy-feely types, recognition doesn't have to be emotional, colourful or flowery, but it does have to be sincere. There are people who will never come to terms with the power of a “thank you” – but you don't have to be one of them.

Here are some quick tips to help expand your comfort zone:

1. Stick to the facts.

If someone worked through their lunch to help you get something done, just say “Thanks for missing lunch to help out.”

2. Be funny instead of mushy.

Try “I heard your stomach growl, so make sure you tell it thanks from me.”

3. Be yourself.

If you normally make references to Star Wars or speak only in rhyme, don't change! Channel your inner Han Solo (“Great, kid. Don't get cocky.”) and your recognition will be even more authentic.





Everyday recognition made easy!

Thinking of what to say, how to say it, and finding the time – it can sometimes be challenging to start giving recognition.

Here are a few best practices that will make you a recognition pro in no time!

1 Just say “thank you”

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.

Perhaps they did their normal tasks, but just did it faster. Maybe someone let you ahead in the coffee queue because they knew you had a deadline; or someone brought you the papers off the printer on their way past your desk.

A simple “thank you for...” or “I really appreciated it when you...” is all you need to make an impact.



2 Make it personal

You're more than just an employee: you're part of a family, a friend, a volunteer... and you have a lot of achievements and milestones outside of work. Managing all of those aspects of life can often be challenging.



Using recognition to celebrate your peers' personal milestones lets them know that you see them as real people; that you appreciate who they are and the other events they have in their lives.

Birthdays, anniversaries, new babies, earning a degree... there are many personal milestones that deserve recognition. Have a little fun writing a congratulatory note or finding an appropriate image to personalise your message.

3 Add on to an original

If one recognition is good, several recognitions are outstanding! Take a look at all the “likes” on social media, and you'll realize just how much we crave approval from others.

When you see or hear someone get recognized, feel free to add onto it. Not only does it multiply the original dopamine effect for the receiver, it lets the original giver know that they're really onto something – maybe reinforcing their recognition efforts in the process.

It's still important to be authentic when adding on to recognition. Start with phrases like “I agree with Tom, you really made a difference by...” or “Congratulations on your recognition for...” and “Your recognition inspired me to...”



4 Widen your circle

It's easiest to recognize people on your team; after all, you are most familiar with their work. In time, you may find you're recognizing the same people for the same things over and over.



Take a chance and recognize someone on a different team, or someone in a management role. While you may not have first-hand work experience with them, you have probably heard about their success on a project, seen one of their posts on the intranet, or had a conversation with them in the break room.

Also, the higher up the management ladder, the less likely it is for people to receive recognition. Make sure your leaders know that you value what they bring to the culture and the organization.

5 Pay it forward

Often, getting your own recognition is a great way to give some too. Remember all the people who helped you along the way.

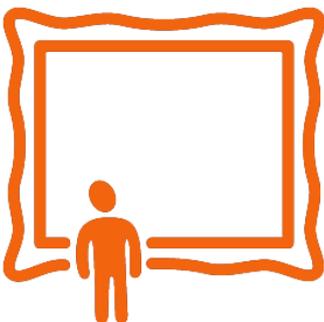
People like to know they've made a difference, so consider who assigned you to a project, who trained you, and who your role models are. When you're working on something, who gives you the inputs you need to complete it? When you're done, who works on it next?

As they say, "it takes a village" – so consider sharing recognition with those who had an influence on your accomplishments.



6 Give it meaning

Your mission, vision and values are more than corporate-speak; they are specifically created to differentiate you from other organizations. They define "our way" and serve as a roadmap to professional success.



When giving recognition, tie it back to one of your values. Reinforce that not only are they doing good work, but they're doing it in a way that supports the culture of your organization.

Another way to make your recognitions meaningful is to explain how that person's actions made a difference to you, the team, or the company. If you emphasise the purpose of the action, not just the outcomes, you change the action from being "work" to something that contributes to the bigger picture. You create a sense of ownership that appeals to our human need to belong.



7 Mix up your method

Giving recognition through your online platform may be the fastest method, but sometimes a different tactic can cut through the virtual clutter.



Handwritten notes are not only personal, they also have staying power. A personal card tends to stay on the desk, bulletin board or may even go in a keepsake book. We don't often go back and read our online recognitions, but a physical card gets read multiple times – a new set of dopamine each time.

Other memorable methods are going out for a coffee, delivering a favourite snack, a celebratory lunch, or public recognition in a meeting. There may be other recognition items available at your company – a branded pen, use of a car park or extra time off. Find out what resources are available to you, and switch up your tactics now and then.

8 On-board the newbies

Whether new to the organization, new to your team or new to the project, nothing inducts someone into the fold as quickly as saying “welcome.”

A “welcome” recognition sets the tone, but on-boarding is more than a one-and-done process. Send a recognition after a few weeks to reiterate the value they bring to their team. After the first couple of months, send another to congratulate quick learnings and other successes. Let them know if you see them demonstrating company values to reinforce their positive behaviours.

Recognition is fantastic for driving daily behaviours, monthly/quarterly progress and project-based or annual results. The more opportunities we have to earn recognition, the more likely we are to feel connected to the organization and willing to give more effort.



9 Embrace times of change

In times of change, sometimes it feels like the best thing to do is keep your head down. In fact, times of change are when people most need to feel connected.



Change, whether good, bad or neutral, can lead to uncertainty and anxiety. The additional stress can make us lose focus, so it can benefit you to acknowledge what others are going through and encourage them to keep making an effort.

Anyone can make a positive impact on a project, team or client relationship; you have the power to make sure they continue to feel good about doing it when you give recognition.



10 Develop the habit

It's easy to develop a habit of recognition. Set aside 15 minutes every Friday morning, write notes on the train home, or challenge yourself to send four per week.

You don't have to write several paragraphs each time, you simply need to be your authentic self. Your sincerity will come across if you are specific and insert a little bit of personality. Write how you talk!

It's also okay to find a few key phrases that work for you, that way you don't have to start with a blank page each time you get ready to recognize someone. Here are a few starters that will help you think of what to say:



“Thank you for helping me...”

“You went above and beyond in the...”

“The client gave us wonderful feedback about your...”

“You inspire me with your...”

“It was great to see you doing...”

To learn more about how BI WORLDWIDE Canada can help you implement results-based recognition in your organization, visit BIWORLDWIDE.ca or email canada@biworldwide.com.

