

5 Tips for Recognizing Employees

1) Know your employees. Do you know how each of your employees likes to be recognized? Some may prefer a simple verbal acknowledgement. Another employee might enjoy a handwritten note. Still others may prefer more public recognition—acknowledgement at a Department Meeting or an email acknowledgement with a cc: to an executive or higher-level leader (if appropriate). Start with a conversation with each of your employees about how they liked to be recognized.



2) Make your recognition specific. Don't just say, "Good job!" Personalize your recognition by saying something like, "I really appreciated your comments in the meeting today—they really helped the group come to a decision" or "Thank you for jumping in and helping with 'x' project at the last minute. I appreciate your dedication to the team's success."

3) Be genuine. Of course, in the interest of being specific (previous tip) you don't want to be disingenuous. Don't say something you don't mean. Employees are smart and can see through your facade. "Faking" compliments will over time erode your personal reputation and trust between you and your employees.

4) Set a goal. If you are not used to working regular recognition into your daily routine—set a goal to genuinely recognize two team members a day each day this week. After two weeks increase your goal to three a day for two weeks. After a month of regular genuine recognition, you will be on your way to a strong habit.

Another technique to get you in the habit—put five pennies in your right pocket each day. As you recognize someone you can move a penny from your right pocket to your left pocket with the goal of consistently recognizing five people a day and moving all five pennies. If you have a small number of employees—your recognition can extend to your peers as well.

5) Rethink feedback. Recognition is feedback. Recognition is just as important to performance maintenance and improvement as constructive feedback. Wanting to be recognized is not a weakness or a sign of a “high maintenance” employee. A desire for feedback and recognition is a human need. Think about how children learn to walk. We encourage and reward (with smiles, clapping and hugs) each successive attempt to walk. What if we only pointed out what went wrong when a baby was learning to walk. Do you think the baby would be motivated to keep trying?

Adults are not babies, but somewhere along the way we forget that adults too like to be encouraged for their attempts and contributions. Too many leaders make the mistake of only providing specific feedback when an employee has made a mistake. Employees who feel appreciated for their work are more likely to trust and respect their leader. Having a trusting mutually respectful relationship with employees lays the groundwork for productive constructive feedback conversations.

