

Recognition Programs

Overview

Recognition programs allow employers to recognize their employees for their performance in health and safety. They can help to define standards of performance, and establish guidelines for evaluation methods of employee behavior.

Happy workers, high productivity and strong customer satisfaction characterize high performance workplaces. Why is it that some companies achieve contentment while others merely breed contempt? The answer is simple. The companies that excel recognize how much value employees contribute to their success.

Recognition programs can play a vital role in a company's growth. They do this by creating a positive work environment, reinforcing desired behaviors, motivating performance, and supporting the mission and values of the company. When done correctly, not only can recognition programs differentiate your company from the competition, it can also impact recruitment and retention. There are a few basic guidelines that must be followed, in that programs must: be targeted to the objectives of the company, be able to be measured and tracked to determine success, and be able to appropriately recognize the employees by providing awards that employees will value.

Benefits of Recognition Programs

Recognition programs enable a company to document the history of past safety performance and emphasize the importance of performing tasks and activities safely. They provide an additional appreciation to employees for a job well done, and can improve employee morale and build confidence.

The 12 Steps of Recognition (based on the SONY Corporation program)

Step 1: Awareness. What will your recognition program be used for? Will it be used for promoting safety, improving performance, driving quality, or building morale? Define the goal for the program and promote the goal through standard lines of communication in the company. Other communication methods may also assist in communicating the program – use posters, contests, group meetings, department luncheons, fliers in employee paycheck envelopes.

Step 2: Define the audience. Determine what the behaviors are that need to be changed or improved upon. Then determine who the program will be targeted for. Is it for all company employees, or one specific department? Identify the people who will most benefit from the program and make a commitment to promote the program in that group.

Step 3: Identify how your program will be set up. There is no cast-in-stone formula to follow. Try different approaches and see what works best. Determine if you will recognize individual performance or team performance. Will it be peer recognition, or data and measurement related? Who will make the determinations of who receives the

award(s)? Will there be a deadline or time frame for submission of candidates? Will the program take the form of a suggestion program, or will it be performance based? Will there be a theme for the program? The company must determine the criteria for the incentive or recognition before the implementation, and then track the data. If the data does not reflect what is needed, then either establish a new goal, or track a different data point – but either way make sure you *communicate* that the parameters of the program are changing!

Step 4: Build a budget. There is no set cost for recognition programs. Items may be as inexpensive as a \$5.00 gift certificate to a \$50,000 car. The budget should be based on what your company can afford to put forth. But, if you don't put forth anything, or what you put forth is not something your employees will like, the "thank you" only goes so far to improve morale.

Step 5: Seek help if you need it. Look to industry groups, human resource firms, or even your competitors to see what they are doing with their programs.

Step 6: Select the awards to be given. You value your employees. Why not extend that value to award items that match what your employees value. Movies, lunches, grocery certificates, electronics, quality clothing items, or cash are examples of items that could be valued by your employees. Take a survey and see what people would like. Suggest price ranges (items under \$20, items under \$50, items under \$100.) You may be surprised what employees come up with, but be sure the awards are something they want. The biggest pitfall in recognition programs is offering an item that is not valued by the person receiving it.

Step 7: Establish the rules for the program. Common criteria for the program usually include: the duration or time frame of the program, the qualifications to be considered for an award, the requirements to be met, the selection process, and how the awards will be delivered. The rules should be clearly written, avoiding buzz words and jargon. Keep it simple and understandable. Make sure the rules are fair and equitable to all parties involved.

Step 8: Communicate the program to employees and staff. Once the essentials are in place, it's time to get the employees involved and motivated! Develop a solid communications plan for the program that determines what will happen (and how) from beginning to end. Be as creative as you like, or delegate someone in your company to oversee the program. What promotional materials will be used and who will create them? How long will the initial program promotional launch take? Don't oversell or inundate the employees with too much information (because they also have jobs to do each day), but use the tools that are available (e-mail, voice mail, morning meetings, intranet systems, etc.) At the mid-point of the program, hang some posters to reinforce the message. At the end of the program, use a company newsletter or e-mail, or some other tool to communicate the changes that occurred because of the program (not necessarily to announce the winners of the awards).

Step 9: Track the changes in performance. Did the program have the desired impact? Did employee attitudes or behaviors change in the desired way? Ask for employee feedback on the program's success. Develop quantifiable methods to determine if the program was a business success.

Step 10: Announce the winners. Congratulate the top performers but be sure to show appreciation to the whole team for their efforts. Meetings provide the perfect opportunity to recognize workers for a job well done. Public recognition reinforces their achievements and serves as a reminder to others to do even better next time. Send congratulatory letters to the employees at home (a nice surprise) or at work. Not only can they share the kudos with their friends and family, but they have a tangible token to remind them of their success. E-mail announcements give instant gratification. Wired workers like to receive immediate recognition and this option is cost-efficient and easy to implement. **But**, be sure to ask employee permission to use their names as some people do not like to be recognized publicly.

Step 11: Deliver the awards. Pay attention to the details of the presentation. First, a letter of congratulations is always required. Deliver any tangible awards on the date promised. If a "ceremony" is to take place, be sure to get the buy in of the participants, and determine if they would just like their name mentioned, or if they would be willing to be called up to the front to receive their award. Make sure their immediate supervisor and top company officer(s) are on hand for the ceremony. If the delivery is to be less elaborate, the supervisor and company officer(s) should still be there to present the award and their congratulations and thanks for a job well done.

Step 12: Maintain the momentum. Just because a program is over, doesn't mean it can't still contribute to the business success. Will you run another program? Will the principles and lessons learned from this program be transferable to another program? Evaluate what worked (and what didn't) in this program and apply it to the next one. Determine if this program helped enhance employer-employee communication, and ask employees for ideas and suggestions on what to do next time, or differently.

Be Careful What You Wish For

There are a few drawbacks to some recognition programs. Be sure you are targeting the correct measures and try to evaluate what the outcomes will be. For example, if your goal is to reduce injuries, and you provide incentive awards for employee groups that go a specified period of time without an injury, will this prevent employees from reporting injuries and accidents? A better measure may be to provide awards for groups that don't have any *lost-time* incidents, rather than incidents in general. Another example could be a suggestion system failure. If employee A makes a suggestion to replace a hazardous chemical with a non-hazardous one, and employee B makes a suggestion to write a Lock-out procedure for a specific machine, who is to say that one suggestion is more valuable or worthy of an award than the other. Both are good ideas. Make sure you frame the goals and objectives of the program carefully, and establish specific guidelines for the evaluation criteria.

Summary

Research shows that accidents can be prevented; it suggests that companies that have programs to reduce accidents and prevent injuries are rewarded with lower disability costs, more satisfied workers, and, ultimately, higher productivity. With a properly structured safety incentive program, you will enhance and sustain these results, and promote a safety culture that provides not only employees with a safe place to work, but also the company with reduced business costs.