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The Five Biggest Mistakes Managers Make in Recognizing Their Employees !

By John Schaefer

Jennifer was at the end of her rope. It was time for a new job, one that would let her use all of her talents, creativity and experience. The exit interview was uneventful, and then she was finally free ! Her manager Roberta was baffled. How could Jen leave? She was on the fast track, with great potential, numerous promotion opportunities and was a key member of the team.
. . . . What went wrong? Sound familiar ?

A recent study confirms that this vast divergence between employee satisfaction and management appraisal is quite common, as well as confusing and expensive to organizations today. How could an employee be so unhappy while management is thinking everything is hunky dory? There are five big mistakes that when addressed properly will reduce unnecessary turnover and immediately improve morale, productivity and profits. With some minor changes in management's communication style, your employees will want to bring their "A Game" to work every day.

Mistake #1 - Not Being Believable !

All executives claims to value their people; but are they getting the message? Recognition programs, incentives, bonuses, at-a-boys are common in most companies, but are often seen as manipulative by the very employees they're meant to incent. Why? There's a fine line between the perception of true appreciation and feeling that you're just "throwing them a bone".

Unfortunately with staffing down, workloads up and everyone busier than ever, it's easy for a manager's recognition efforts to be perceived at just going through the motions, not coming from the heart. When your managers understand what's in it for them and begin to "Make it Real", their interactions are seen as genuine, with the employee in mind, not as leverage that benefits the company and leaves workers feeling like nothing more than a piece of meat.

Mistake #2 - Not Being Organized ?

Once your employees begin to believe you truly care about them, the next mistake relates to the number of disjointed programs companies use to recognize and reward their people. Each has its own history, function, author and responsible party, so even if they're working, there's no easy way to tell. It's impossible to properly train your management team about how to use them correctly and in the right order, so effectiveness suffers.

By coordinating all of your employee communications, training, recognition and performance processes into one organized system, you will be able to understand and control costs, manage and rate results and get the most for your investment in people.

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Mistake #3 - Not Using a Strategy ?

An organized approach is great, but the system won't last is if it's not tied into a strategy based on the company's core values and goals. Strategic planning is a leadership function that allows all employees to understand where they fit into the total scheme of things and how their performance directly effects the organization.

Once everyone begins to see that they are all on the same team, marching in the same direction for the same reasons, synergy happens and your combined recognition efforts yield much more than the sum of the individual parts.

Mistake #4 - Not Having Management Buy-in ?

Even if you solve Mistakes #1 - #3 completely, your best efforts are likely to fail, if you don't have strong, honest and consistent support from the top. Companies could use a professionally produced video featuring a top executive(s) to not only launch any new program, but then continue to demonstrate their passion and dedication to the goals and objectives over time. Employees are very quick to see through any signs of the company being disingenuous.

Poor upper management involvement is the number one sign that you're using recognition as a manipulative lever, not an appreciation boost. To keep your top executives intrigued, committees must present program enhancements that show significant and measurable results, not just emotional blue sky and hype.

Mistake #5 - Not Following Through ?

Any program, no matter how exciting, rich, well organized or effectively supported will lose its momentum over time if it's not fully integrated into your company's performance management culture. This is by far the most overlooked weakness in many recognition strategies and it's very disappointing after you've done so much right. A quality reporting system along with an empowered team prepared to manage the information is critical to keeping your programs relevant, fresh, interesting and profitable. The true test of a well functioning recognition strategy is when you can quantitatively prove to your CFO that it's turning expenses into profits over time.

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The five mistakes are quite common, extremely costly, but relatively easy to avoid with some simple communications training and the ability to look at entitlement programs with an open mind. Yes, they are called "entitlements", because that's what your awards programs become if they are left alone for very long. It's nobody's fault, so don't point fingers.
Just decide to address each mistake in order from #1 to #5, gain support and then develop a measurable set of initiatives that will make the best use of your company's dollars. The good news is that today's tools and technology solutions make it easy to develop measure and analyze an effective recognition strategy.

About the Author:
John Schaefer is a Consultant with more than 20 years of experience helping companies realize and react to what he calls the Employer/Employee Disconnect. John is the author of The Vocational Shrink - An Analysis of the Ten Levels of Workplace Disillusionment, as well as The Vocational Shrink The Game and Manager Training Program ***"Why Should Supervisors Care?"*** which gets to the bottom of what they're really thinking, "what's in it for me?"
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