4 WAYS TO GET MANAGERS TO RECOGNIZE EMPLOYEES AGAIN

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Employee engagement continues to have a huge benefit on business. Organizations with higher numbers separate themselves across every worthwhile metric. They post higher revenues and profits. They capture superior market share and they attract higher stock valuations. Just as importantly, they manage to keep voluntary turnover low and customer advocacy high.

That’s good news for any business that’s gaining on the employee engagement front. But what’s troubling for all the others is that fewer and fewer of them are making any real headway strengthening their numbers. Engagement scores across every industry category showed a flattening last year. Businesses are just not capturing the emotional and intellectual commitment of their workers the way they were years ago. For companies stuck with stagnant scores, the question is: who (or what) is to blame?

Recent data does show some positives. Employees find their jobs to be interesting and challenging. They feel they understand their company’s plan for success and appreciate how their efforts fit into the bigger picture. They feel connected with their co-workers and, for the most part, trust them.

So where’s the issue exactly? The problem for employees is not necessarily who they work with, it’s who they are working for. Employees don’t feel like their managers value them; nor do they expect them to recognize their contributions anytime soon. In fact, the expectation that an immediate supervisor will give regular feedback or encouragement fell four times further than any other factor impacting an employee’s sense of engagement.1

The conclusion here is as obvious as it is troubling. The front line manager’s participation in the employee recognition process is lacking and needs immediate attention. Here are 4 ways to get your managers recognizing employees again.

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As a global leader in Social Recognition, Madison’s business approach encompasses the totality of a company’s performance drivers and focuses on the individuals responsible for ultimate success: employees, sales, and channel partners. Madison harnesses its groundbreaking, highly configurable, cloud-based Social Recognition Technology and leverages scientific principles and findings to guide desirable change of human behavior and elevate performance.
1/ Provide a system that’s easy to use. Managers will often complain that they are too busy to stop what they are doing to acknowledge an employee’s efforts. As a result they put recognition off. In fact, most never get around to it. If and when they finally do, they can come across as generic or insincere.

More often than not, the managers who say they don’t have the time to recognize their employees don’t have access to an automated system. For those that do have access, they say the platform in place is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. This is where companies can do themselves, as well as their front line management a big favor. Installing a system that streamlines the entire recognition process from eligibility determination, to approval adjudication, to award issuance and budget reconciliation will overcome the protests of “I don’t have time” or “it’s just too difficult to use.”

2/ Train them on its value. Making the process simple is a big part of the equation, but so is educating managers on its value. Most companies don’t offer their front line managers the type of integrated training that connects program initiatives to their roles in the organization. To get them recognizing employees again, managers need to be reminded that regular and timely recognition is a performance catalyst. They need to know that partaking in the program will make them a better manager and they need to understand how the system will support them in the process.

For busy managers, availability of content is just as crucial as the message itself. Just-in-time features, such as on-demand flash movies, can walk managers through the mechanics of issuing recognition while also connecting its frequent and timely usage to better management practices. The training curriculum should make it clear that the consistent use of recognition will strengthen local business results and it should stress that managers who recognize employees regularly, perform significantly better than those who don’t.

3/ Assign budgets. Recognition programs tend to underperform when they are rolled out without any accompanying reward budgets. There is a simple reason for that. As a breed, managers respond better to initiatives when allocations are attached. Often they won’t participate in a program (or at least won’t do so at the optimal level) when they don’t understand the parameters for doing so. Who can blame them? With cost savings pressures, responsible managers are reluctant to “spend” dollars that have not been clearly funded.

Budgets serve several key roles in business. Their usefulness goes beyond the practicalities of fiscal forecasting, planning and control. They also signal support by executive management and indicate that the activity allocated for is indeed a priority for the business, something that’s been increasingly the case as far as recognition is concerned. Last year 65% of all companies running formal programs increased their budgets. Many will do the same in 2017. It’s imperative that individual managers have a clear mandate on where and how to use those funds.
Like any other employee, managers want to be acknowledged for doing well. Not only do they respond positively when their work is recognized, they are more apt to repeat it when it is.

4/ Track and recognize their participation. Front line managers respond to two things: clarity and competition. As discussed above, budgets and training clarify what’s important and what needs to get done. As your program becomes “live,” you will want to track and recognize their participation in it.

How do you do that? All recognition transactions within the platform should be captured and monitored. System generated data will offer the insight you need to determine which managers are using the program and which might still need an extra push. Here you can leverage additional training and targeted communications to turn underperformers around.

The data can also be applied to stoke competition. Smart program sponsors have been known to get creative here. Some might post graphs on the site illustrating which managers are using the system more. Others might issue badges earned for superior utilization or profile a manager who has used recognition to drive better business results within their teams. Either way, what they are doing is appealing to a manager’s competitive instincts. Like any other employee, managers want to be acknowledged for doing well. Not only do they respond positively when their work is recognized, they are more apt to repeat it when it is.

SUMMARY

Fewer and fewer companies are gaining any real ground when it comes to employee engagement. Front line managers are to blame.

While employees say that they respect their coworkers and understand how they fit into the company’s plans for success, they also complain that their immediate supervisors don’t provide the type of regular feedback or encouragement that propels engagement. More than any other factor, it is the manager’s absence from the recognition construct that’s contributing to stagnant engagement scores.

So how can you get the front line manager participating in employee recognition again? Installing a system that streamlines the entire process is a start. That will overcome any protests about recognition being too time consuming. You will also want to train them on its value. Managers need to be reminded that regular and timely recognition is not only good for business, but that it will make them better at their jobs. Next, you will want to assign budgets because what doesn’t get budgeted doesn’t get done. Finally, track their participation. Acknowledge those who do recognize their employees and continue to reach out to those who don’t.

1 2016 Employee Engagement Trends, Quantum Workplace
2 How companies manage the front line today, McKeevy
3 2016 Trends in Incentive Travel, Rewards, and Recognition, The Incentive Research Foundation