

# A Guide to Starting a Recognition Program

Whether you are starting a new recognition program or looking to revamp an existing program that is underwhelming your employees or not meeting your expectations, these expert tips will help you structure and implement a program that is a fit for your organization. The most important factor to keep in mind is that the success of your program will correlate directly with the amount of planning that you put into it up front.

## *Policy and Design*

Employers should provide a clear, written policy and guidelines describing the recognition program and its terms, including:

The organization should communicate both the criteria and examples of the types of work behaviors that warrant an award. This communication will help all employees understand how to judge the desired outcomes. It will also ensure timely recognition, which is necessary for the program to be effective.

When defining the decision-making process and the levels of approval required to receive an award, authority and responsibility for program administration should be distributed as widely as possible in the organization.

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Performance reviews for managers and supervisors should include a section on how well they reward and recognize strong performers in their respective departments or divisions. Knowing that they will be measured on how well they have used the available tools for motivating employee results tends to help reluctant managers focus on using the programs.

Some employees may not be as motivated as others by an organization's incentives, so organizations should offer a variety of incentives and recognition opportunities to meet various employee needs.

Finally, when designing a recognition program, allow it to be adjusted later as circumstances warrant—new situations may suggest new ways to recognize employees.

### ***Essential Criteria for Success***

For a recognition program to be effective it should meet several criteria. The program should be well-funded, aligned with organizational goals, appropriate for employees' achievements and timely. The methods of presenting awards must be managed well, with managers themselves playing key roles. The process for choosing and recognizing employees should be straightforward, and the program should be reviewed and evaluated regularly.

### ***Sufficiently Funded***

The key to success for a recognition program is management's commitment of resources. During the budgeting process for the year ahead, the organization should earmark funds for the program and establish methods for distributing the funds to departments, divisions or subsidiaries. Managers must dedicate the resources—including the time it takes to plan and execute a program—and must enable employees and supervisors to run the program.

Through this process, managers can see that the distribution is fair and equitable and that the money is allocated and immediately available to fund the program once it is announced to employees.

### ***Aligned with Goals and Values***

Recognition programs are most successful when they are aligned with the organization's mission, vision, values and goals. Employees can tell if there is—or is not—a clear connection between what management says is important and what is actually rewarded at work.

### ***Appropriate***

Employees must understand the rationale for a recognition program and should be convinced that the awards are in line with the achievement and the degree of effort they represent. A recognition system will falter if employees feel that their work is trivialized or even insulted by inconsequential incentives or insincere gestures of appreciation. Awards should be consistent with the employee's achievement and meaningful to the person receiving it. An employee who completes a two-year project should be rewarded in a more substantial manner than an employee who does a quick favor for a manager.

Program participants must believe that the recognition system is just and objective. Thus, all employees who meet the criteria for receiving an award should be included and recognized. And employers must make certain that the awards are in keeping with the organization's culture; what works in one environment may not work in another.

### ***Timely***

The reward or recognition should be delivered as close as possible to the time of the desired behavior to strengthen the link between the employee's action and the result to the organization.

Although some organizations designate a specific day or week for employee recognition, recognizing employees in real time rather than waiting for a future event is considered the better practice.

### ***Artfully Carried Out***

The manner of delivery can make or break a program. The reason for the award—the behavior that is being reinforced—should be spelled out. Awards should be presented in a sincere and heartfelt manner. Employees can be motivated more by a manager's single act of personal consideration than by a substantial gift delivered poorly.

Although recognition awards are generally presented directly to recipients by their manager, in some organizations, awards are held for presentation at a special event such as a banquet, a luncheon, a staff meeting or a company-wide meeting.

Some employers can generate recognition awards and gifts—for teams at multiple sites, for example—via the Internet.

Sometimes awards are mailed to the employee's home. Beware, though, of the form letter. One quick thank-you note personally written by the employee's manager and hand-delivered to the employee will have much more impact than a perfunctory form letter and a coffee cup with the company's logo.

Managers and supervisors may neglect to recognize employee achievements because they do not know what to say. A simple recipe for recognition can work magic: Thank the employee by name, state what the employee did to earn the recognition, explain how you felt about the employee's achievement and how it added value to the organization, and thank the employee again by name. Addressing the person by name and saying that you personally value his or her effort can be as motivating as the actual reward.

### ***Measuring Success***

Between 3 and six months after your program has been launched, it is time to go back and review the goals and behaviors that the program was designed to effect and evaluate if the outcomes are achieving them by measuring:

**Employee Satisfaction.** Initiate surveys to take the temperature of your participants to assess their feelings on program communication, fairness, expectations for participation and results.

**Short-term Behavior Change.** What does participation look like? Has performance started to change? Is progress towards goals starting to take shape?

**Long-Term Behavior Change.** Identify changes in productivity, increased morale, reduction in PTO, increased customer satisfaction, and improvement on performance

**Financial Performance.** Evaluate if there are results in employee retention levels, increased sales results,

### ***Keeping Programs Effective***

As with any program or business process your recognition program needs to be assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it remains impactful and relevant to your changing business goals. In particular, a new program should be reviewed with increased frequency to make sure you are headed in the right direction. Through the use of participant surveys, the re-evaluation of goals, and making adjustments where ideas just don't work, you are sure to maintain the enthusiasm of your program.

With these guidelines, you will be ready to build and launch your recognition program the right way, from day 1. For further information on the CoreCentive solution that fits your company and program the best, please contact us and our recognition experts will be ready to make your vision a reality.

Call us at: **267-797-2332**

or visit: **Corecentive.com**