The power of saying "Thank you"

A guide to making employee recognition social

Everyone loves a like!

We see this every day in our personal lives, even if we don't yet see it in our workplace. The social media landscape is set up to provide positive reinforcement and recognition to help people build social connections that feel valuable on both sides. Each time we give or receive a like, it boosts our self-esteem, gives us an incentive to keep doing what we're doing and makes us feel more connected to our network which is more important than ever, following the need for remote working and social distancing.

This doesn't just stop when we enter the working world. According to many researchers, getting recognition right is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to boost the engagement of your employees.Deloitte notes a high correlation between recognition and improving employee engagement. They have found that employee engagement, productivity and performance are 14% higher in organisations with recognition programmes, than in those without.

Employee engagement isn't just good for your employees; it's good for your whole organisation too. According to Psychology Today[1], investing time and resources in ongoing recognition, coaching and constructive feedback has been found to increase revenues by 26%, decrease employee turnover by 31%, improve customer satisfaction by 54%, and increase shareholder return by 22%. So why does recognition have such a positive impact on an organisation and its employees?

[1] Psychology Today

It connects your people

Ashley Whillans, Assistant Professor at Harvard Business School, says that in the workplace 'these types of recognition work because they tap into three strong psychological needs: Employees long for autonomy, with the freedom to choose how to do their work; they want to appear competent, armed with the skills needed to perform; and they want to feel a sense of belonging by socially connecting with colleagues in a meaningful way.'

The last point is particularly pertinent to organisations today. In an increasingly globalised working world and with the surge in remote working following the coronavirus outbreak, teams are more spread out than ever before. Yet, the increase in technology and social platforms in both our professional and personal lives means our expectation and desire for connection is ever-present.

Social recognition is proven to build a happy, engaged and high performing workforce. When the recognition is based on your organisation's core values, it connects and aligns your people – so everyone is growing in the same direction.

Whillans adds that a peer-to-peer recognition programme 'builds social connections in a workplace, which helps people feel more fulfilled at work."

It's good for business

Numerous studies have shown that great recognition, and improved employee engagement can foster impressive benefits for organisations.

A survey conducted by Gallup[2] found that employees who receive regular recognition not only displayed increased productivity, but also boosted their engagement with colleagues, had better safety records on the job and were more likely to stay with their organisation.

A second study by SHRM[3] found that companies that promote peer-to-peer recognition are 36% more likely to have a positive impact on financial returns, compared to those that don't. The same study also saw respondents noting positive increases to other key business metrics within companies that use peer-to-peer recognition, including 41% that have seen an increase in customer satisfaction, and 32% seeing an increase in customer retention.

Bringing in a peer-to-peer recognition system can also prevent organisations wasting time, money and effort trying to monitor achievement, recognition and reward. Having one system, with everyone giving and receiving recognition in the same way makes it easy for organisations to monitor and report on recognition and reward across all employees.

It also makes it easy for business leaders to get a high level view of achievements across the organisation, as well as surfacing and rewarding outstanding achievements with ease.

[2]Gallup
[3]SHRM

access

It gives managers the time and freedom to recognise truly valuable work

Most leaders and managers would love to give timely, thoughtful acknowledgment of every valuable contribution each member of their team makes. Unfortunately, it's not often feasible. Most managers are busy and have multiple responsibilities to handle and may not have time to give meaningful recognition of great work on a regular basis. If like many organisations, they are managing people in multiple locations or those doing various diverse roles, they simply might not see the great work going on behind the scenes.

This can lead to employees feeling that their work is under-appreciated or that recognition is biased and always lands with those colleagues who have the 'right' kind of visibility with those giving out recognition.

Decentralising recognition empowers all employees to recognise great work and effort. This helps to make regular, timely and specific recognition the norm. It follows that recognition isn't only reserved for completed projects or to coincide with results or set performance review periods. Social recognition increases the opportunity for acknowledgment, meaning employees are recognised more frequently for their creative input, for putting in extra effort and for excellent work on specific tasks or in their day-to-day roles. Managers naturally lack the bandwidth to spend their days noticing and shouting out great behaviour. By encouraging regular social recognition among teams, and giving them the tools to make sending and responding to a shout out as easy as posting on social media, recognition becomes a natural and regular part of our working world.

This doesn't however mean that once social recognition is put into place, leaders and managers can sit back and leave it to the rest of the team to acknowledge great work. In a Gallup[4] workplace survey, employees were asked to recall who gave them their most meaningful and memorable recognition: "The data revealed the most memorable recognition comes most often from an employee's manager (28%), followed by a high-level leader or CEO (24%), then the manager's manager (12%)".

Recognition from leaders and senior members of their organisation is important to many employees. Regular peer-to-peer recognition gives managers better visibility of all the great work that is going on within their teams, or outside their direct line reports. It allows them to build on a base of authentic, detailed recognition to effectively acknowledge great work at every opportunity.

[4]Gallup

It builds a culture of gratitude

Some of the most recognition-worthy work is done within teams, with employees going the extra mile to help out or solve a problem for their peers. Without social recognition, that great work can easily go unacknowledged.

A key benefit of peer-to-peer recognition is that it is utterly authentic; employees are not obliged to give feedback or recognise accomplishments because it's their job. They recognise accomplishments because they genuinely value them. The authentic nature of peer-to-peer recognition drives reciprocation. When someone receives a shout-out from one of their peers, there's an instinct to pay that acknowledgment forward in kind.

This can cause a real shift in the mindsets of teams. As social recognition grows, a culture of gratitude starts to build at a rapid pace. Employees feel valued, confident that the work they are doing is contributing to the broader success of their teams and their organisation. The impulse to repay gratitude in kind also encourages employees to recognise and appreciate the work others are doing around them, helping to build those social connections mentioned by Ashley Whillans in her research.

This culture of gratitude far exceeds the 'warm and fuzzy', casual approach. According to Psychology Today[5], psychologists find that, over time, feeling grateful boosts happiness and fosters both physical and psychological health, even among those already struggling with mental health problems. Studies show that practicing gratitude curbs the use of words expressing negative emotions and shifts inner attention away from such negative emotions such as resentment and envy, minimising the possibility of ruminating, which can be a sign of depression.

So, by building this culture of gratitude, organisations are not just fostering the immediate effects we've already shown, but are actively contributing to the well-being of their employees, which, as we know, has a significant impact on productivity and satisfaction in the workplace.

[5]Psychology Today

It models and reinforces desirable behaviours

By its very nature, one-to-one feedback is limited to the giver and the recipient. Yet if organisations harness social recognition, they can start motivating not just the recipient, but also their peers who can see the kind of behaviour, work and attitude that is encouraged and appreciated in the work environment.

Deloitte Research[6] shows that only 60% of organisations tie recognition to business goals. However, effective social recognition can help organisations breathe life into their core values and goals, embed them in employees' day-to-day lives, really helping employees to understand and embody those standards every time they come to work.

Every social acknowledgement is an opportunity to show those core values in action, to demonstrate how they contribute to the organisation's success in real terms, and to form a best practice blueprint for other employees.

We know that employees will shift their behaviours to match desired actions to be recognised. If employees regularly see their peers recognised for behaviour they are not yet exhibiting, that process of alignment can be expedited.

Allowing every employee to recognise when their teammates do something that helps them in their role not only allows colleagues to build those intrinsically important social connections within their team, but also gives managers an insight into the types of behaviour or work that are driving a team's performance. If you frequently see a particular behaviour recognised by your teams, yet not reflected in your strategy or company values, that insight can help you to adjust focus.

[6][Deloitte](#)

So how do you introduce peer-to-peer recognition into your organisation?

The simple answer is make it simple. Give your teams the right tools. Most of us use social platforms everyday, we know how to post, how to like and how to interact there with our networks and connections. So your peer-to-peer recognition software should make giving social feedback at work as intuitive and fun as using those platforms in our personal lives.

There's really very little else to it, most research shows that the nature of peer-to-peer recognition means that it's self-perpetuating and intrinsically motivating. Once you set up the correct tools and encourage your employees to start showing their appreciation for their teammates, organisations often find programmes like these to require next to no effort to run and support.

The Access Applause Hub has resources that can help you get started, and get it right for your organisation.

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