



Supporting CommUnity

The DNA Code of Recognition

By Lori A. Hoffner

Culture... the work environment that you supply for employees. Employees are motivated and most satisfied when their needs and values are consistent with those manifested in your workplace culture. Susan M. Heathfield

DNA...stands for the deoxyribonucleic acid, sometimes called “the molecule of life” as almost all organisms have their genetic material codified as DNA. DNA is unique and a valuable tool in connecting people to actions. Vocabulary.com

The buzz word these days for business is culture and there are lot definitions out there on what it is. Easily stated, culture is the sum of attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people (businesses) from another. It's important to understand your culture, but it's even more important to LIVE your culture. Make the culture within your organization a living organism that embodies the core values, mission and/or vision statements you and your staff have adopted. What is the attitude of your organization? How do you and your staff distinguish yourself in your community? Because the culture of your organization is like that of a living organism, it can change, morph and evolve depending on needs and trends. Therefore, the idea of creating a culture that supports staff in a variety of ways should just be a part of the DNA of your business. The overall DNA is constant and unique – something that your staff knows they can count on. There are expected behaviors which in turn creates the attitude or culture. Why not have a strand of your organizations DNA code be one that embraces the behavior of intentional recognition of staff?

In my workshops and education session, “Purposed Based Recognition,” I talk about this behavior and the power it can have. When an organization engages in intentional recognition, it becomes ingrained, one DNA code that all staff not only depend on but find ways to participate in. It moves beyond a “nice to have” benefit to an invaluable practice. Intentional recognition can be the most powerful way to inspire, encourage, and measure the values you have chosen for your organization.

There are many steps that you can take to make recognition practices strategic and successful. Here are five of them:

Provide timely recognition: Waiting for the annual, semi-annual or even monthly staff meeting to recognize an individual or department for a “job well done” not only reduces the efficacy, it's an antiquated approach. Empowering all of your staff to recognize a “job well done” means that the employee(s) will receive immediate feedback and positive reinforcement. This inspires greater engagement and buy-in by all staff.

The recognition is specific: Saying “thank you,” “good job” or “you're a valuable member of the team” is important and necessary when creating a culture of support. Being specific about that recognition makes it meaningful to individuals. What are you thanking your employees for? How did they do a good job? In what way did their effort positively impact the organization?

Everyone can provide recognition: A strategic approach to creating a culture of support is encouraging all members of your staff to participate in recognition practices. Executive level staff can model the behavior of a “top-down, bottom-up, side-to-side” pervasive attitude (culture) of recognition.

You frequently provide recognition: The more often your team members hear thank you and the variety of ways the thanks is shared, the more likely it becomes a common practice throughout your organization. Everyone begins to feel empowered and powerful. This generates an overall feeling of loyalty to your company, a trait that many say is lacking in today’s workforce.

Know your team: Whether you have one employee or 1,000 it is still possible to create a successful recognition practice. Knowing what motivates your staff and ways to recognize individuals makes it meaningful. You may not know everyone, but members of your team will know the staff within their departments and they can help create that culture of support. For example, inviting someone that is more of a behind the scenes kind of personality to a large staff gathering and have them stand in front of the group to receive a plaque of recognition usually is not meaningful to them. Instead, it’s something they just have to get through; if they show up at all. The behind the scene personality might find recognition more meaningful if it’s just a lunch with you and key members of their team. Taking the time to know the best way to provide intentional recognition for staff members represents both the DNA of your organization and the culture you’re creating.

The question I receive most often when discussing how to make intentional recognition a part of a company’s DNA and ultimately creating a culture of support is, “Why do I always have to say thank you? What if the employee really isn’t meeting our expectations?” My response is twofold. 1. Creating a culture of support means that you’re going to give that employee the necessary tools, training and mentoring needed to reach the level of success that you’re hoping for. That in itself is recognition because you’re showing your trust in that employee’s ability to learn and succeed. 2. Accountability. If that team member still does not meet the expectations, then it might be time to make the sometimes challenging but necessary changes in order for the rest of the team to flourish. I consider accountability weeding. In order for the organization to continue to grow, you want the best. By removing those that do not encourage growth, it provides recognition to the rest of the team and value they bring. It is the DNA code your staff can count on and reinforces a culture of support.

How are you making yourself unique? What is your constant? If part of your DNA code is intentional recognition, then your organization’s culture inspires employees to greater achievement. In turn, your organization becomes a place that receives recognition from the community in the form of loyalty and continued support of your work.

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