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As the weather warms up, take the time to celebrate your team's hard work through the cold winter months. When is the last time you had a fruity mock-cocktail on the porch on a weeknight? The sunshine brings a perfect opportunity to throw an outdoor "thank you" party. This type of employee recognition is just the motivation you and your employees may need to feel appreciated and rejuvenated. Not to mention, getting the group together outside the office cubicles can bring on some camaraderie and even creativity. So go ahead, enjoy the Spring!

Kristin

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RECOGNITION: A LEADERSHIP TOOL TO MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES by Joseph Sherren

I popped into Anna's Country Kitchen in Crapaud, Prince Edward Island which is one of my favorite eating places, for lunch this past week. There was a crew of workers also having lunch with their boss, Glen Stewart of Glen's Place. In a joking way he asked me, "How do I motivate this crew to work harder?" A great question that every leader should be asking.

I said, "Well, a good start is just what you're doing – feed them!" People always work harder when they are not hungry. However, the answer is much deeper than that. We all think that people in different industries, of different wage classes, and different age groups must be motivated differently. However, the truth is they are not.

There is actually a universal concept that functions to motivate everyone and it is this: Workers just want to feel valued and appreciated. Sorry folks, it is as simple as that – recognition.

In fact, there have been numerous studies and extensive research done on this topic. One of those was from a survey completed at Wichita State University. It reported that employees rated a manager's "thanks" as THE MOST motivational incentive of all. Unfortunately, over 58 percent of the employees said they rarely received a personal thank you.

When I ask managers why not, I often get the following response – "Well, I'm not

complaining, so they should know I appreciate them.”

That is like when your spouse says – “You don’t tell me you love me anymore.” And you respond, “I said it the day we were married, if anything changes I will let you know.”

Author of the study, Dr. J. Allan Peterson, discovered that, in fact, it is the same in our personal relationships. Sixty-nine percent of married people do not work at building their marriages. They simply take each other for granted.

Peterson says the average husband has the attitude of, “Why do you have to chase the bus once you’ve caught it?” And the average wife has the attitude of, “Once you’ve caught the fish you throw away the bait.”

At the root of almost every relationship that has gone bad is the fact that there was too much taking for granted and not enough effort put into giving. The bottom line is this: Any good relationship, at home or at work, is built on a foundation of respect and appreciation.

Many of us underestimate the importance of using recognition as a leadership tool. However, appreciation for all levels of employees, whether in a large corporation, or workers in a small mom and pop business, will work magic.

Employees tell me all the time how much they value personalized recognition for a job well done. However, I find in many organizations, employee recognition is lacking. This can become a key element to meeting the retention and productivity challenges facing most organizations.

Every employee, regardless of where they are in the food chain, is hungry for acknowledgement. So by using personalized recognition, you tap into the best way to motivate them and bring out their hidden talents.

Studies show that employees who are rewarded for going that extra mile are more productive and fulfilled, show greater loyalty and are eager to contribute to the organization in an impactful and meaningful way.

Bottom line is this: Employee recognition, at all levels, is a simple and powerful tool to create and sustain a culture that engages and aligns employees with organizational goals. This has been proven over and over and it applies to organizations of every size. The best part — it doesn’t cost anything!

Mary Kay Ash once said: “There are two things people want more than sex and money – recognition and praise.”

HOW TO MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE EVERYDAY DECISIONS

We make decisions all the time. From the moment the alarm goes off (Shall I get up or hit the snooze button?) to the time we go to bed, we are constantly making decisions. Many are “ritualistic” – those decisions we make on autopilot. They are engrained into our schedule, whether they are good for us or not (brushing teeth when you wake up and go to bed – that would be a good ritual – and having six martinis every night might not be in your best interest!).

On the other end of the spectrum, we have the big, ginormous decisions that have a huge impact. They don’t happen as often and require a substantial amount of time and/or resources, so we tend to take them a bit more seriously. We are more thoughtful and discerning between the possible outcomes. For example, Joe and I are looking at downsizing our Arizona home, so the amount of time and energy we have devoted to discussing this decision is FAR more than opting to brush my teeth this morning!

But what about that middle ground? Not everyday decisions, but not ginormous either. Should we attend this function this afternoon? Should we work on this project

now? It is this zone that I find the most troubling. People tend to make decisions in this zone rather cavalierly – and without considering all the options. For example, when you go to a function or work on a project, you are not able to use that time to do something else. Is that the best use of your time?

Drs. Richard Paul and Linda Elder call this phenomenon “thinking too narrowly” and contend that it is “difficult to correct, as no one believes he is thinking too narrowly (when he is).”

Ah, how ironic! Could we have such high opinions of ourselves and our ability to make good decisions that we don’t even realize that we are thinking narrowly? And here’s another twist: “The more narrow the thinker, the more confident the thinker that he is broad-minded.”

Oh my. It seems like a self-perpetuating loop. Paul & Elder go on to say,

A good rule of thumb is that if you can think of only one or two options when making a decision, you are probably thinking too narrowly. So what’s a confident, narrow thinker to do?

When facing a decision, take a moment...to think. What’s the decision in front of me? Is this my ONLY choice? It might be the most obvious, preferable, easiest, but it certainly is NOT the only choice. What other choices do you have? There is always another option.

I love to use the “10X Rule” where I HAVE to come up with ten alternatives. And if I can’t come up with at least ten, then I ask my friends and family to help!

It may be that your first impression is the best decision at the time, but how do you know that to be true? When you take a moment to think about how you go about making decisions, the more thoughtful your decisions will become.

PANEL MODERATORS: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PANELISTS HATE EACH OTHER

I’ve talked about the importance of picking “DEEP” panelists – Diverse, Experienced, Eloquent, and Prepared. But what happens if those panelists don’t get along? I was talking to a meeting professional who confessed, “I pick panelists who hate each other!”

That could be a problem for you and the panel moderator, and quite lively and interesting for the audience!

Do Your Research. Once you find out they truly “hate each other” – dig a little deeper on this as part of your research. Is it a personality conflict? Some kind of historical bad blood between them? Or could it be professional differences of opinion? From your research, discern what will help and what will hinder your panel discussion. For example, you can easily leverage differences of opinions during the discussion – and probably want to stay away from bad blood issues!

Play with the Format. If you know that the panelists disagree, why not create a debate-style format where the panelists can disagree with each other in a more formal, yet non-threatening way? The audience will love the cross-fire type of format!

Watch the Dynamic. Watch the behaviors and dynamics of the panelists during the pre-event call (if you have one) and in your final meet-up before you go on stage. I have seen panelists who venomously dislike each other put on a game face and play nice. And I have also seen panelists who bring out their fangs on stage. You just never know. So watch the dynamic closely so you are not caught completely off-guard.

Sit Apart. Consider having the panelists in assigned seats – as far apart from each other as possible. You don't need to fan the fires by putting them next to each other!

Establish Ground Rules. I always give my panelists a few “ground rules” to keep in mind: Keep it conversational, all participate...no one dominate, and be additive not repetitive. If I know there is some bad blood between panelists, I'll add, “Let's generate light around the issue and not heat.” And if you are really worried, you may want to be even more direct: “Let's put our differences aside, and let's have an amazing conversation with each other on behalf of the audience.”

Don't Be Surprised. Come prepared to intervene if the blood starts to boil! Have some quick sentence starters to shift the conversation:

- That's an interesting point. Let's see what our other panelists have to say.
- Wow! There's a lot of passion around this topic. Let's see what questions the audience has about this topic.
- So it sounds like there is a fundamental disagreement on this topic. Is there another perspective/course of action we haven't considered?

Put an End to It. If things get completely out of hand (I haven't seen that happen often, but it has been known to happen), call it. State what you specifically notice about the situation and request to stop that discussion thread. Then start a new discussion. For example: “We don't need to shout and talk over each other. Obviously, there is a tremendous amount of passion and conflicting views about this topic. How about we agree to disagree on this point and move on?”

It is not unheard of for panelists to hate each other – so be prepared to handle the situation with grace and aplomb when it does happen during a panel discussion!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE TRUTH ABOUT EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

I had to laugh when Patrick Lencioni confessed that his book, *Three Signs of a Miserable Job*, had a miserable title! After all, who can read a book about a miserable job when you're at work? So he changed the title to [*The Truth About Employee Engagement: A Fable About Addressing the Three Root Causes of Job Misery*](#). Same book, but you can read it in public without having people look at you crosswise.

When you think about it, the Three Root Causes are fairly obvious:

1. **Anonymity.** People cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known. All human beings need to be understood and appreciated for their unique qualities by someone in a position of authority. People who see themselves as invisible, generic, or anonymous cannot love their jobs, no matter what they are doing.
2. **Irrelevance.** Everyone needs to know that their job matters...to someone. Anyone. Without seeing that connection between the work and the satisfaction of another person or group of people, an employee simply will not find lasting fulfillment.
3. **Immeasurement.** Employees need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves [not just for the team and/or organization]. They cannot be fulfilled in their work if their success depends on the opinions or whims of another person, no matter how benevolent that person may be. Without tangible means for assessing success or failure, motivation eventually deteriorates as people see themselves as unable to assess their own fate.

While these may be a bit obvious, they are much less easy to implement on a consistent basis. Lencioni provides lots of ideas and insights about how to “cook” these principles into your job - and to help others see the line of sight between what they do, why the work they do matters and how the contribute.

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