

J. Michael Locke

Musings

#30: The Power of Recognition April 21, 2020

Go to <https://gilesrichard.com> for past musings.

Companies spend multitudes of hours designing and implementing their compensation systems. I wish the same effort would go into employee recognition systems.

Individuals want to be fairly compensated, but most are not *just* working for the money. They want to be paid fairly but they also want to be challenged, they want to learn, and they want to work with people they like. Millennials place a high importance on alignment with the employer mission. Most importantly, individuals want to be recognized and pride is the best motivator of all.

A benefit of motivating the team through pride is that it does not impact the P&L. You can do it through tough times like these as much as in good times.

One technique is to create a rotating trophy where an award is given every month or quarter. Go to a local antique store and buy an old trophy or go to the trophy store and have a new one made. I have even seen folks use a candy dish of jelly beans as the “trophy.” The team knows what it is and keeps an eye out to see who has it. It is usually most effective to award the trophy in some kind of ceremony.

An “Employee of the Month” with a plaque highlighting previous winners is always effective. Consider naming it after a well-liked colleague. A unique one I have seen is the wall of gold-plated patents at the headquarters of Ecolab. If you want to create a culture of innovation, there you have it. Get a patent and you get a gold plaque on the wall, almost like the Football Hall of Fame.

You can also use job titles. Our Deltak team created a progression of titles – Program Manager I and then Program Manager II etc. While this promotion did not necessarily mean more money, it showed good performance and knowledge attainment (a test was required.)

The military is obviously the most accomplished at this technique. There is a clear hierarchical system of titles. You earn the next title not through time but performance. You know a Brigadier General represents someone “above a colonel but below a major general.” In addition to the well-known title hierarchy, you have the symbols – a three-star general or someone with a Purple Heart.

Finally, the most powerful recognition system may be handwritten notes from “the boss.”

When is the last time you received a handwritten letter at home? If you are like me, it certainly is a rare occurrence, so think how special it is when it happens. I am a big proponent of writing notes and letters to your team. It does not have to be lengthy, but team members really enjoy it when you take your pen and write a note of thank you or congratulations. Sometimes I see them hanging in a person’s cubicle

almost like a trophy. If you are like me, you might have some old ones you have received years ago still in a drawer that you pull out and reread once and a while.

Be safe. Write a note today to someone who has done good work (email doesn't count).

Jml

Second Thought

In *Musing #10 Leader as Coach*, I wrote about using "we" instead of "I." This also applies to the possessive adjectives. You should use "our" and not "my." So it is "our team" that accomplished something not "my team." I want to throw something at the TV every time I hear Trump speak of "my administration." Personally, I think it would be interesting if a Presidential candidate not only picked their Vice President running mate but picked some of the key cabinet jobs like Treasury, State and Education. You could vote for the team not the person. The team gets the job done.