

Going on an employee recognition mission

You may think you give employees the feedback, coaching and support they need to know their contributions are noticed and appreciated.

But if they disagree, those you manage could be less productive and more at risk of leaving. In fact, data compiled by Gallup indicates that just one out of every three workers said they received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days.

Those who don't feel appreciated for their contributions are twice as likely to say they'll quit their job in the next year.

Here's a closer look at what resonates and what falls flat when it comes to making employees feel appreciated.

Awards aren't necessarily the answer

Employee recognition programs that single out a few top performers and reward them publicly have become popular.

Unfortunately, they can inherently create a workplace culture where a handful of top performers are "winners" and by default, the majority of those not recognized become the "losers." Expressing employee appreciation isn't about crowning a victor; it's about letting all employees know their hard work does not go unnoticed.

Develop a genuine relationship

A team of researchers at Babson College found that a gap often exists between the appreciation managers think they express to employees, and the perception employees have of whether they're appreciated.

The researchers surmised that the disconnect is fueled by a misunderstanding by managers that expressing appreciation must be a grand gesture. In fact, the researchers found that some employees said having a boss who simply made a point to ask them how they were each morning and genuinely took the time to listen to what was happening in employees' lives, professionally and personally, resulted in the employee feeling appreciated.

Don't give mixed feedback

No employee is perfect, and your positive and constructive feedback are important to supporting and encouraging employee growth.

Yet, the Babson College research team also found that when managers mix expressing appreciation with developmental feedback, both can fall flat.

For example, the researchers found that when managers tried to couch constructive feedback for ways the employee could improve between positive statements, employees who were most in need of improvement remembered only the positive feedback their manager gave.

Top performers tuned out positive feedback from their manager, but retained the negative.

Appreciation is a matter of simply expressing your gratitude for the effort and energy a person brings to the team and the workplace, regardless of outcomes. Save developmental feedback for its own conversation.

Be authentic

Employee appreciation programs that involve a gift or similar type of compensation are often used to thank employees for their service, but they can have the opposite reaction if they are seen as generic or disingenuous.

If you want to give employees a tangible show of your appreciation, take the time to give them something that reflects an interest you know they have, even if it's as simple as a gift card to their favorite coffee spot.

The Babson College researchers also found that gestures like suggesting an employee take the opportunity to work from home on a Friday after a long week of business travel can be a meaningful way to show you recognize how much effort the employee puts in, and appreciate it.

Make appreciation a habit

One study conducted by O.C. Tanner found that appreciation is most effective in boosting employee satisfaction when it's expressed frequently: 69% of employees who had received some form of workplace appreciation in the last six to 12 months reported being satisfied with their jobs, compared to 80% of employees who had received an expression of appreciation in the last month.

Reserve a few minutes on your calendar each day to identify an employee especially deserving of your gratitude and go tell them how you feel!