

Recognition Objections: Overruled!

There are many reasons we don't recognize our employees more frequently. Mostly it's because our underlying assumptions about employee recognition get in the way. It can also feel awkward to some of us, and at the same time, we may be expected to be naturally good at recognizing our employees, even though this is a skill we have not likely been taught. No wonder there are barriers! Take a look at some of the recognition objections listed below, along with the responses. See if you might toss out some assumptions and find employee recognition easier than you think.

 **I don't have time for recognition.** If you are still reinventing recognition every time, trying to figure out how to approach it, digging around for paperwork, and how much you have to spend on a reward, then deciding the reward, then you may be right. That takes a lot of time and energy. To make it easier for every manager, I invite you to consider the simpler and more effective approach. For example, is public recognition really the best approach? Do you have a few minutes per employee to let them know the impact they are having, especially if it leads to increased performance and less turnover? You may find that you do have the time.

 **I'm not sure what to do. I might get it wrong.** Most of us are not naturals at recognition. It's possible that you might get recognition "wrong" to some degree. No one wants to do something they aren't going to be good at. That is, unless you give yourself a break, and increase your skills with recognition. Learning how to recognize others is best modeled, or with training. If you have not been trained in delivering recognition, as most managers have not, then the using the tools in *Recognition Rebooted* are a great way to start. Practice with someone you trust, or record how it sounds in your smartphone first, or whatever method you choose. Don't wing it! Take 30 seconds to think through the tools, and you will be fine, and the intention will count, especially if you tell them of your plan to recognize the work more often.

 **Recognizing feels awkward for my employee and me.** Yes, you are right; it can be awkward. Let the person know your intention is not to embarrass him or her. If you wait until you don't feel awkward, you may never recognize. I promise, though, it will get easier as you gain the courage to recognize your team members, and the awkwardness may even lessen or go away. You may eventually even look forward to the conversation.

 **I have no recognition budget.** Even better. Rewards are not the same as authentic recognition and can lead to critical missed opportunities for the manager. Instead, focus on recognizing your team member by earnestly communicating the impact she or he has had without thinking of the reward first. It is more effective to authentically recognize your team member and *then* use rewards sparingly and deliberately. Recognition should come from you, not the finance department's budget.

- 🔄 **People like rewards, they're not complaining.** If given a reward, most of us will gladly accept it. But a reward without telling each person why they received it, and how it impacted the organization, falls flat and will not likely get the results you are looking for.

- 🔄 **What if we don't have turnover, maybe consistent recognition is not necessary?** You are fortunate. Perhaps. Are there team members who you fear leaving your organization? And if they do, will you benefit if they are still your ally? Are there team members who you *prefer* would leave your organization? Are there team members who might be performing better if they were more motivated? Do you want to be a very effective people manager? Do you wish to increase your leadership skills? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then consistent recognition is necessary.

- 🔄 **We already have a recognition program, what then?** Does it work well? Is it contributing to increased engagement, motivation, and performance? You are not required to use the program to let your team member know that performance is impactful. If you are feeling energetic, try recognizing your team more often and see your results. Partner then with HR to find ways that the company program may be adjusted.

- 🔄 **What if executives are not on board?** Focus on impacting your team whether or not executives are on board. In some organizations, getting executive buy-in can be a tall order. Do you need all the executives on board to tell a team member that her or his work is impactful? Show some value in this area, then see if that gets executive attention if you choose to broaden the recognition message.

- 🔄 **What about me? My boss doesn't recognize me.** Rising above this may perhaps define you as a leader. If this is your reality, ask yourself: How productive is it for me to wait around for my manager to recognize me? How productive is it for me to withhold recognition for those who deserve it?

- 🔄 **What about poor or mediocre performers? Should they be recognized?** Recognition is situational. Every manager's job is to treat their team members as individuals, not as a large singular unit. Ask yourself why the person is a poor or mediocre performer. Is the person performing this way, yet trying exceedingly hard? Then praise the *effort*, but not the work. Be truthful. This may help the person gain confidence and skills. If the person is not performing well, and not giving much effort, then no, do not recognize the work or the effort. That may sound harsh, but to do so, could be demotivating and confusing to your other performers.

- 🔄 **Won't people call foul if they see others getting recognized more than they are?** They might. Assuming you are recognizing for valuable impact sincerely, welcome that conversation with any team member! What a great chance to explain why others have been recognized, and how that person can get more recognition. It is healthy to be transparent about it. As a reminder, managers will do well to consider the cautions on public recognition.

-  **Isn't it like giving everyone a trophy?** When you recognize everyone at the same time for the same thing, it is. When you individualize it and use the tools, then you are off to a very effective start. Remember, there needs to be a valuable impact to qualify for recognition.
-  **Isn't it their job to do their job?** Yes. And it is a manager's job to do theirs. Employees deserve to know when their work has great impact. Do you want employees to meet expectations, or do you want your employees to feel motivated and have stronger performance? Do *you* want to meet expectations, or do you want to be one of the best managers they've ever had?
-  **They already get Service Awards. Isn't that enough?** Service awards are for undisputable milestones. A work anniversary, or a major event in the person's life, for example. While they are nice to have, they have little connection to organization performance. There are exceptions in some organizations who create rituals and lively conversations around these awards that *everyone* looks forward to and enjoys, but that is rare. It would be a disservice to the organization, you and the employee to consider the service award a major form of recognition. Keep the service awards if that is a wonderful tradition in your organizations; be sure, though, to separate it from authentic recognition which can have a deeper meaning and better results.
-  **Diversity of heritage, age, culture, background. How does this tie in?** The feeling of knowing your work has value and impact is universal. It is the approach we take that matters. In some cultures, public recognition is not desired; in others, it may be expected. From an age standpoint, generally speaking, we do know that millennials otherwise known as Generation Y (age 20-mid - 30s roughly), who will soon make up the majority of the workforce, have a higher expectation for feedback. They also like to know that others are aware that they've been recognized. This should not be confused with, nor assumed that all millennials prefer public recognition. Regardless of age, heritage, culture, background look at your team as *individuals* and learn from each person and their preferences. This goes a long way in getting it right.