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Good Soul Toolkit

Your guide to boosting performance through recognition

All the best-performing brands have one thing in common – the best people. They know how to discover and engage the most talented and best-trained people in their fields. They know how to inspire the best from them - perpetually. They know how to keep spinning the winning edge of results by keeping their most important asset happy.

We are in a moment where 60% of employees feel unappreciated.

That's why, in today's ultra-competitive (yet values-driven) work environments, it is more important than ever to find ways to keep talent motivated. And given that motivation is an inside job it's key to facilitate an environment where talent is intrinsically stacked to succeed.

And the best way to generate motivation?

Money? Nope.

To truly motivate people, you need to:

Create a positive work culture in which they feel valued, safe and happy. Challenge them to improve, help them develop and make sure they have support when they need it.

Sound complicated? It doesn't have to be.

The good news is that there is a simple tool to help unlock that value. It is recognizing and rewarding team members.

RECOGNITION → MOTIVATION → PERFORMANCE

Let's explore why employee recognition in the workplace is an innate part of company culture.

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RECOGNITION

Q: Why do we acknowledge and reward team members?

A: Because happy employees are more motivated and more productive.

One of the biggest motivators for any employee, regardless of their role, industry or experience, is to be held in high esteem by their peers. One of the turnkey ways of earning that respect is to be acknowledged for being good at what they do.

Recognition...

Motivates + Reinforces particular behaviors/practices/activities + Boosts morale

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Results in better performance and positive business results

Being recognized for excellence at work helps build confidence, encourage contribution and creates a feeling of job mastery.

From an employer's point of view, it also helps develop a bond between the brand and its employees. A team member who is confident about their ability to do the job is much more likely to feel a deeper connection to it. This develops trust and the feeling that they're a great fit for both the role and the business and that they are contributing in meaningful ways to the overall vision.

Furthermore, peer-to-peer appreciation is a powerful opportunity to show the good soul vibe.

Recognition is therefore an enabler for:

- ◆ improving productivity
- ◆ enhancing loyalty
- ◆ promoting collaboration
- ◆ boosting morale

The basics – what are the different forms of recognition?

Not everyone feels appreciation in the same ways, but most people love to be caught doing things right. And if the feedback is delivered in the way they like it - the dopamine hit is even sharper.

Gary Chapman and Paul White adapted their Love Languages to something a little more office-appropriate: *5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*[1]

1. **Acts of Service - 22%** of the workforce prefer this

2. **Quality Time - 26%** of the workforce prefer this

3. **Words of Affirmation - 46%** of the workforce prefer this

4. **Tangible Gifts - 6%** of the workforce prefer this

5. **Appropriate Physical Touch - >1%** of the workforce prefer this
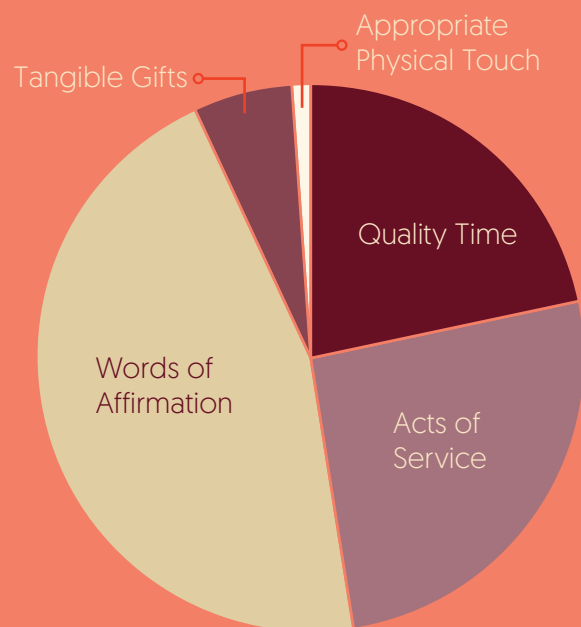
When tailored to individuals in the workforce, these five "languages" can be used to express genuine appreciation to co-workers and employees (even on a tight budget), increase loyalty with the employees and volunteers in the organization, reduce cynicism and create a more positive work environment, and help us show appreciation for difficult colleagues.

Effective employee recognition is **timely**, **genuine** and **aligned with employees' preferences and needs**. The more personalized the method of recognition or reward, the better and more impactful it will be.

[1]https://www.blueboard.com/blog/in-your-own-words-the-5-languages-of-employee-appreciation

Recognition – and any reward – should also be genuine. As the entire purpose is to improve performance and to result in repeated success, it should always be based on real individual performance and contributions.

This doesn't always mean only recognizing "winners", however. Plenty of projects can be more challenging to get the bronze than winning gold in others. And on long, hard projects - celebrating milestones along the way can be crucial to keeping the momentum to complete.

Here are our 10 Good Soul Picks for meaningful recognition:

5 Actions and 5 Gifts

1. Say it: Simply saying "thank you" or mentioning/praising a job well done goes a long way in recognizing employees. Be specific about what they did and how it created a positive impact. Be authentic. Be timely.

2. Hear it: Regularly seeking feedback from employees and involving them in decision-making processes is a form of recognition. It shows that their opinions are valued and that they have a voice in the organization.

3. Write it: Sending a personalized note or email expressing appreciation is a meaningful way to recognize someone's efforts. As long as you are sincere and specific in what you say. Double points if they are in the 46% who prefer Words of Affirmation.

4. Award it: Presenting employees with awards or certificates is a tangible way to recognize their efforts. Tread carefully with the clichéd "Employee of the Month" or "Top Performer" Awards which can demotivate both the winner and others.

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5. Celebrate it: Celebrating milestones, such as work anniversaries or team achievements, with social events fosters a positive team culture and celebrates not only success, but loyalty.

6. Gift benefits: Providing financial incentives, such as bonuses or gift cards, can be an effective way to recognize employees for their outstanding performance. Make sure the rewards are meaningful and aligned with the employees' preferences.

7. Gift development: Offer team members opportunities to grow professionally through training programs or workshops. It shows that you value their development and are willing to invest in their career growth. Mentorship works well with younger employees.

8. Gift time: The work-life balance has, thanks to the pandemic, never been a hotter topic. Offering flexible work arrangements is now a valuable form of recognition for employees who value flexibility. Gifting more time off with proven tenure is also trending.

9. Gift fame: Recognizing employees in a public setting – whether a team meeting, a company-wide event or an announcement on the website – can do wonders to boost morale and motivation (if that suits their style).

10. Gift wellness: Implementing wellness programs, such as gym memberships, wellness challenges, and mental health support demonstrates to your employees that you care about their well-being enough to prioritize their health.

BRANDS DOING IT RIGHT

Here are a few examples of brands that have taken recognition to the next level.

ZAPPOS

The multinational, online shoe and clothing ecommerce platform is famous for its workplace culture – it even has what it calls "Zappos' Insights" , which is all about sharing the company's core values with a global audience.

It has created a strategic employee recognition approach based on a peer-to-peer format, with employees sharing low-cost, high-frequency rewards with each other. Employees can earn "Zappos Dollars" which they can redeem in the office via branded vending machines. Employees can also donate these dollars to a Zappos partner charity.

APPLE

No great surprise they operate at the top of the tree, as the tech giant has always had a great reputation for its workplace experience (most of the time).

The brand's employee recognition strategy is based on rewarding independent thinking. Apple routinely rewards employees with stock, product discounts and volunteering incentives. It's not all about "show me the money", either. In the past, it has surprised employees with extended holidays and other similar bonuses – with rewards customized according to the employees' locations and job roles.

GOOGLE

Another tech giant that scores big on its employee satisfaction – and another one that gets recognition right.

Take the "gThanks" program, where employees are encouraged to do a shout out to other employees when they have done something great. Google even built an internal tool to make it easy for its employees (aka Googlers) to recognize one another.

There is also a peer bonus program, where co-workers can nominate each other for cash bonuses. Google has a wide variety of awards, big and small, to help motivate their employees.

The employee life cycle

The best employers approach individual team members as just that – individuals.

This also means that each team member has their own, individual life cycle. This includes their personal goals, development, progress, and results. Employees who started on the same day, doing similar jobs, might have different life cycles due to the different trajectories they take.

Hiring a new member of staff marks the **beginning** of an employee's cycle. The lifecycle stages include:

Train   **Develop**   **Motivate**   **Retain**

At each of these four stages, **recognition** plays a big part in their happiness and progress. In the world of work today the lines are being blurred and lifecycles are changing. The pandemic has changed our working environments and patterns forever; therefore the framework of recognition must shift too.

Recognition: changed

For example, the workforce has become more diverse, with employees from different generations, backgrounds, and cultures having different preferences and expectations when it comes to recognition. Employers are now realizing how vast the solutions need to be to truly meet the unique wants and needs of the broader team.

This has led to a shift in how recognition is delivered. One expected casualty is related to recognition through performance with less and less companies relying on regular, annual "appraisals" and/or automatic pay increases.

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Culture Clubs

There is also an ongoing shift culturally. Many brands are now prioritizing positive and inclusive organizational cultures that promote employee well-being, engagement, and retention. Recognition has become an essential tool to foster these values-driven, inclusive cultures, because they reinforce desired behaviors, values, and achievements. Therefore, employers are shifting away from traditional approaches to focus on recognition efforts that are aligned with diverse cultures and values.

Making it personal

The importance of a positive employee experience is impacting the workplace. This has become crucial for attracting, retaining, and engaging top talent and recognition is a key player for employee satisfaction. Employers are increasingly striving to create meaningful and memorable recognition moments that go beyond just monetary rewards or formal programs. This may include personalized recognition, social recognition, and experiential recognition that cater to employees' emotional needs and preferences.

The Re:Re (remote recognition)

The pandemic has birthed a hybrid beast. With the rise of remote work, the gig economy, and flexible work arrangements, the dynamic of how work is done has been entirely transformed. Employers must now adapt their recognition strategies to accommodate remote or distributed teams, as well as employees who may have non-traditional work arrangements. This may involve leveraging technology and digital tools for virtual recognition and finding creative ways to connect and appreciate employees regardless of their physical location and any other limitations.

Well, well, wellness

Another of the legacies of the pandemic is the focus on employee wellbeing. As a result, more and more of the recognition efforts are being designed to support employees' wellbeing by considering factors such as work-life balance, mental health, and stress management. This can extend to recognition programs that prioritize employee wellness, flexible work arrangements, and initiatives that promote work-life integration.

As the process of recognition becomes more complex in the journey from "newbie" to "seasoned guru," amidst evolving life cycles - it's important to keep evolving your systems to meet the changing needs of your people.

Companies relying on the one-trick pony of annual reviews as the sole source of recognition across the year are increasingly being considered dinosaurs. And while few employees ever turn down extra dollars, there is a lot more expected by the Gen-Z talent pool.

So, what alternatives do you have? If you ditch or amend your annual reviews, what can you replace them with?

Here are our 6 Good Soul alternatives to annual reviews:

Continuous, 365/360-degree feedback

Instead of waiting until one designated day in the year (which feels like 100 years in today's work world) consider implementing a system of continuous feedback through the 365 days. This involves employees receiving feedback on an ongoing basis from a 360-degree angle (by gathering performance feedback from multiple sources, such as managers, peers, reports, suppliers and even customers).

Then provide the feedback in regular check-ins, one-on-one meetings – and maybe via real-time feedback tools and platforms – this provides a more holistic, comprehensive, and accumulative view of an employee's performance and development areas.

You can also shift towards a goal setting and performance conversation approach, where employees and managers collaboratively set performance expectations, define goals, and have regular conversations to review progress, provide feedback, and align on expectations. This approach focuses on ongoing performance management and development, rather than a one-time annual review event.

Continuous feedback means adjustments can be made in real time and the array of voices means feedback can be specifically applied in several different areas.

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Check-Ins and Stay Interviews

Check-ins and stay interviews are informal conversations between employees and their managers to discuss their job satisfaction, career aspirations, and any challenges they may be facing. This approach focuses on building a trusting relationship between employees and managers, fostering open communication, and addressing any concerns or developmental needs. These should happen at least annually but preferably 6 monthly or quarterly.

Skill-based Assessments

Organizations can implement skill-based assessments that focus on evaluating employees' skills and competencies in specific areas relevant to their roles. These assessments can be conducted periodically, or as part of ongoing performance management discussions. Skill-based assessments provide objective data on employees' strengths and areas for improvement, which can guide targeted development efforts.

Peer Recognition and Social Recognition

Peer recognition and social recognition programs allow employees to recognize and appreciate their colleagues' contributions and achievements. These programs can be facilitated through online platforms or tools that enable employees to give and receive recognition publicly, which can foster a positive and collaborative work culture.

Employers can choose to retain as much, or as little, control as they like. The idea is that recognition, when coming directly from their peers, will mean more and will be more authentic and organic.

Employee Development Plans

Instead of focusing solely on performance evaluations, try placing a stronger emphasis on forward-looking development plans. Creating personalized development plans for individuals – which outline their strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for growth – will lead to employees taking more ownership of their progress and development. The plans can be created collaboratively between employees and managers and can be reviewed and updated regularly.

Identifying landmarks and goals, with clearly set rewards, makes the process more transparent and immersive.

Coaching and mentoring

Promote coaching and mentoring. Develop the relationships between employees and their managers, so that managers (or other leaders) serve as mentors, providing guidance, feedback, and support to help employees reach their full potential. Build this into your onboarding process, so that incoming team members are immersed in the system from the get-go.

The great thing about this approach is the way it emphasizes continuous learning, growth, and development. And it's two-way learning - where both sides benefit from the experience.

And finally...

Whichever method of recognition you decide to utilize to boost performance, keep in mind the basic formula:

Recognition leads to motivation, which leads to improved performance.

Every move you make should have a clear goal in mind – which is to create a positive work culture in which your team feels valued, safe and happy.

Seeking talent to grow your team? We hand-pick good souls for purpose-driven brands. Get in touch: hello@goodsoulhunting.com

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