

Recognition: The Importance of Saying Thank You - By Dennis Snow

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Retaining excellent employees is a strong concern for all organizations in today's workplace. According to a massive study conducted by the Gallup organization, an employee's direct boss has the greatest impact on retention.

Connected to this is the abundance of employee exit interviews that indicate a lack of recognition or appreciation as one of the top reasons for quitting a company. Therefore, it makes sense that the most effective recognition comes from the employee's direct manager.

Organizations are always on the lookout for the reward/recognition program that will maximize employee performance. While these programs can be effective, it is important to know that a program can never take the place of a sincere thank you from the boss. If you want employees to exceed the expectations of your customers, it is vital that you recognize them when they perform in a manner that exceeds expectations. If you want employees to perform in a manner consistent with your service standards, it is vital that you notice when they do so and recognize their performance. There is a very real phenomenon called "extinction." This occurs when we ignore performance of a desired behavior. If you desire responsiveness from employees, yet ignore them when they demonstrate excellent responsiveness, the behavior will eventually become extinct and performance will revert to previous levels (not necessarily bad, but not at the desired, higher level).

Studies have demonstrated that recognition has its greatest impact when it takes place immediately after the behavior. When employees do something special for a customer (external or internal), their emotions are elevated because they know they did something good. If the leader recognizes the employee while the emotion is still high, it dramatically increases the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated. The more time that passes, the less impact the recognition will have (although it may still be appreciated). The point is, don't lose the magic of the moment when it comes to recognizing performance.

Another aspect of recognition that is important is storytelling. Storytelling has proved to be a valuable tool to "lock in" recognition. As a leader, if you have recognized an individual for excellent performance, tell the story at the next staff meeting. Really tell the story. Let everyone know what the person did and the impact it had. Better yet, depending on the situation let the employee tell the story. This not only makes the employee feel good, it allows his/her co-workers to join in the celebration. This type of storytelling helps perpetuate a commitment to service excellence. The word "recognition," in fact, comes from the Latin, "to know again." Effective recognition allows the employee to know again the feeling of performing at a high level or reaching a significant milestone.

About the Author:

Dennis Snow is the president of Snow & Associates, Inc. Dennis worked with the Walt Disney World Company for twenty years and now consults with organizations around the world helping them achieve their customer service goals. He is the author of the book, Unleashing Excellence - The Complete Guide to Ultimate Customer Service.

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