



Faculty Publications

2008-11-05

Reducing Theft through Meaningful Recognition

David J. Cherrington
david_cherrington@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub>



Part of the [Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

D.J. Cherrington, "Reducing Theft -- Meaningful Recognition", *The Hayes Report on Loss Prevention* Volume 23, Issue 1, Pages 2, Hayes International, Fruitland Park, Florida, 1, 28.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Cherrington, David J., "Reducing Theft through Meaningful Recognition" (2008). *Faculty Publications*. 916.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/916>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Reducing Theft through Meaningful Recognition

David J. Cherrington

Department of Organizational Leadership and Strategy

Brigham Young University

Provo, Utah, 84602

November 5, 2007

A fact that is seldom appreciated when dealing with employee theft is that most antisocial behavior at work is closely associated with employee attitudes. Research has frequently found that job dissatisfaction and feelings of unfairness are correlated with undesirable behaviors, such as tardiness, turnover, theft, and wasting time on the job.

Another thing that is seldom appreciated is the fact that meaningful recognition programs can significantly improve employee attitudes and they don't have to cost very much. Although some companies sponsor elaborate programs that are very expensive, and highly appreciated, it is possible to create a meaningful recognition program on a very low budget. Gifts and other awards are nice, but they are not the heart of a meaningful recognition program.

Effective recognition programs make people feel appreciated for their contributions to the organization. Everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and respect; even mediocre workers should be thanked for participating in the organization and helping it succeed. But outstanding performers who are diligent and consistent deserve special recognition for their efforts.

There are three important principles of meaningful recognition. An outstanding program needs to include these three basic components:

1. *The person's contributions to the organization are acknowledged.* Recognition involves noticing and acknowledging an individual's or team's accomplishments. Acknowledgement requires the interpersonal skill of paying attention and being interested in what others are doing. But, simply noticing is not sufficient; people need to know that their contributions have been observed. The acknowledgement is generally best when specific observations are described rather than general summary comments only. As a general rule, public acknowledgement is more meaningful than private acknowledgement, especially when it occurs in the presence of significant others, such as family members and co-workers. In some cultures, however, public recognition can be embarrassing unless it is for an entire team.
2. *The reasons why one's contributions were helpful are explained.* People want to know that their efforts are making a meaningful contribution to the organization's success; they want to know how they are helping. Understanding why their contributions are helpful teaches them the natural consequences of their actions and helps them to develop a stronger work ethic.
3. *The person receives sincere thanks.* Although this expression could be a simple "Thank you," it could also be accompanied by a wide variety of

extrinsic awards. The most meaningful form of thanks is the intrinsic satisfaction that people feel from knowing that their efforts have been noticed and sincerely appreciated. However, these intrinsic feelings can be supplemented and reinforced by extrinsic rewards that are meaningfully associated with the appreciation. As a general rule, the most meaningful extrinsic rewards are (a) awards that have symbolic meaning due to their association with the organization (such as items that symbolize the company's value or contain the company logo), (b) awards that are perceived as precious and luxurious (such as those made with gems and diamonds), (c) awards that are valued by the person because of their instrumental value (such as travel, vacations, office or home accessories, or sporting equipment), (d) awards that have enduring value (such as most non-cash awards), and (e) experiences that make people feel special (such as banquets and other celebrations in their honor). The awards should not be a substitute for or detract from personal expressions of sincere appreciation. Also, awards that are not associated in some way with a person's contribution to the company are simply incentives and not recognition awards.

Before anyone dismisses the potential impact of a meaningful recognition program they ought to ask themselves, "When was the last time I felt overly appreciated? Have I ever been loved to distraction or so admired that I couldn't stand it any longer?" Employees who feel appreciated are more satisfied and more committed to the company. I would speculate that the savings from reduced employee theft would more than pay for the costs of an outstanding recognition program.