

Providing a Motivational Environment with Proper Associate Recognition¹

Derek Farnsworth, Jennifer L. Clark, Clayton Becton, Allen Wysocki, and Karl Kepner²



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Introduction

Are you providing the right motivational environment? Most believe that motivation comes from within, so it is the manager's responsibility to create a positive motivational climate within the workgroup. Assessing how well the manager is accomplishing this can be gleaned from research by Spitzer (1995). His research indicates that 70% of employees

(associates) are less motivated today than they used to be; 80% could perform significantly better if they wanted to do so; and 50% only put in enough effort to keep their job.

So if associates admit that they could be more motivated, what is the problem? Is it the manager? Managers may not directly motivate their associates, but they are directly responsible for the motivational environment of the workplace. Managers and frontline supervisors, in many ways, are the heart of a business because they are the key components to creating positive, neutral, or negative work environments.

So how does one ensure a positive work environment? This paper provides examples of how managers de-motivate associates by providing inadequate recognition and gives a few tips to support associate recognition.

Inadequate Recognition

Providing constructive criticism and praise should be a constant and ongoing process for managers. The worst thing a manager can do is to give half-hearted recognition to associates, which defeats the purpose of recognition in the first place. How is recognition viewed as a de motivator? The following examples show how managers can inadvertently de motivate associates while attempting to motivate them (Vikesland 2001):

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2. Derek Farnsworth, assistant professor; Jennifer L. Clark, senior lecturer, Food and Resource Economics Department; Clayton Becton, former graduate student; Allen Wysocki, associate dean and professor; and Karl Kepner, emeritus professor, deceased; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

- Recognize the associate's length of employment instead of his or her successes
- Give the associate a "pat on the back" instead of more job responsibilities
- Recognize only the associate's attendance while ignoring his or her team-player attitude
- Reward only individuals instead of everyone on the team
- Compliment the associate for work done over the past year instead of showing immediate appreciation after each task is completed
- Praise the associate only for special tasks instead of daily

Improving Associate Recognition

A positive motivational environment can be created by using techniques of management theory to improve associate recognition.

1. Provide Immediate Recognition

Recognize and praise the associate as soon as the task is completed; immediate praise is always a must. Associates may feel unappreciated if they are not recognized in a timely manner, so make sure that associates always receive immediate recognition for good work.

2. Recognize Small Improvements

Even though a manager may view an associate's improvement as a small accomplishment, the associate might view the same improvement as a large accomplishment that required considerable effort. All accomplishments, no matter how large or how small, should not go without some form of positive recognition.

3. Provide Incentives

Always provide some form of incentive to motivate and reward associate improvement. Recognition does not always come in monetary form. There are many non-monetary incentives to show associates they are appreciated and respected for their contributions.

4. Recognize What Is Important to Associates

All associates have issues and interests outside the workplace that can be identified by managers that genuinely engage with associates. Associates should feel that their managers care about them as valuable human beings, not just "work horses." Saxby (2002) recommends that

managers make sure that recognition is on a personal level and not just a "go-through-the-motion ceremony."

Conclusions

Managers should make sure associates feel appreciated and respected by using appropriate recognition and motivational techniques. By focusing on motivational efforts that recognize employee contributions and minimizing efforts that are inadequate for these efforts, managers show associates that they are valuable assets to the company and worthy of praise.

To provide a positive motivational environment that will maximize associate motivation, remember to praise all improvements often and sincerely and find out what is important to your associates. The organization's reward should be more productive associates focused on long-term organizational goals.

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