

Credit Where Credit is Due

From time to time, a company owner or senior manager will tell me that they're not really the praising type – but that it's okay because their employees just roll with it. Really? That's not what I hear when I talk to the employees. Whenever a leader is stingy with credit and praise, the employees have a lot to say about it.

Even in well intended companies, the fast paced environment often results in praise and credit getting lost in the shuffle. And then there are companies that withhold praise because they don't want to give employees an inflated sense of importance for fear they will demand more money or seek a better opportunity elsewhere. Faulty logic. Many more employees, particularly top performers, are lost to inadequate praise and acknowledgement then because management made their heads swell.

If your employees were asked to anonymously answer the following questions with a 1-5 rating system, how do you think you would fare? More to the point, why aren't you getting all fives? Acknowledging your employees is easy, it doesn't cost you anything, and it pays huge dividends.

1. My ideas are acknowledged as mine
2. My role in the success of projects is acknowledged
3. My role in the success of the company is acknowledged
4. I am complimented in front of clients
5. I am complimented in front of other employees
6. I feel appreciated

Here are a few ideas for integrating credit and acknowledgement into the culture and operation of your firm:

Get caught saying positive things about employees behind their backs

Use the basic office reality that “everyone tells everyone everything” to your advantage by using employees as positive examples of things when talking to other employees. It *will* get back to them, and there is something very powerful about employees knowing they are top-of-mind enough to be mentioned even when they aren't there.

Credit employees in front of clients

Go out of your way to compliment employees to clients. Sometimes clients make it easy by providing an opening. If a client compliments some aspect of the work, that's a perfect time to say. “Thank you - John here ran the team that pulled that together” and so on.

Applaud their accomplishments in company meetings

Take the time to publicly acknowledge employee achievements in company or department meetings. You don't have to make a big deal out of it, but even a simple status report can be framed in terms of what people did to get you there. It's easy to replace “Our big meeting with the such and such client went well” with “Thanks to the efforts of Mary and her team...”

Ask them to mentor junior employees or teach things in which they are proficient

Asking someone to teach or mentor is essentially saying that you like their approach or skill enough that you would like them to influence others, and it is, perhaps, the ultimate compliment. There are those people who aren't comfortable in the teaching or mentoring role, so obviously this isn't appropriate for everyone. But the people who respond well to it tend to really recognize the level of responsibility that goes along with such a request and give it their best effort.

Say "thank you"

Sound obvious? It's widely underused in companies of all types. "Nice job pulling that presentation together for the meeting" is good. "Nice job – thank you for the extra effort it took to get it done on such short notice" is golden.

Employee satisfaction studies routinely reveal that having a sense of contribution and making a difference on the job ranks among the top employee motivators – right up there with getting paid. Why not capitalize on this aspect of the human condition?

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