

Does One Reward Fit All?

By Bob Nelson, Ph.D.

Recognizing individuals is one thing. But recognizing teams is trickier. Learn how one management expert says managers can praise group results and individual contribution—at the same time.

Human resources professionals should know a lot about praising individuals. But do your managers and line supervisors share the same wisdom? Decades of behavioral research has proven that when it comes to human behavior, you get what you reward. Workers will respond positively to incentives they value. Employees are motivated by recognition. But to be effective, it must be immediate, sincere, specific and based on performance. Recognition also works best when it's personal and comes from an employee's immediate manager or others in the workplace who are held in high regard. Ironically, most workers value simple recognition for a job well done more than most other incentives, including money. But have you recently con-

sidered how one's knowledge of individual recognition and rewards also can be applied to teams?

Recognize team success. While managers report that 60 percent to 90 percent of their time is spent in group activities, they also indicate that a significant amount of time is wasted or used ineffectively. To exacerbate

the problem, managers believe they receive little or no training in the skills needed to get their group to function like a team. HR should, therefore, provide opportunities for managers to learn team-building skills.

The first step managers should take in using recognition to build a high-performing team is to acknowl-

edge the successes of all team members. Similar to recognizing the achievements of individuals, some of the best forms of team recognition are personal, such as a manager individually thanking a member of the team who has done a good job; thanking group members for their involvement, suggestions and initiative; or sending a letter to all team



members thanking them for their contributions.

Simple ideas also can be very effective at bolstering team spirit and group morale. Encourage managers to conduct informal retreats throughout the duration of the project to stimulate communication and set goals.

Hold a company sponsored lunch meeting with project teams once they've meet interim findings. Express appreciation and encourage their continued energy. At the end of the project, send the project team on an outing.

These ideas, and many like them, are informal and easy to implement. Advanced Micro Devices Inc. in Sunnyvale, California, uses photos of work teams in company publications. Executives at JASCO Tools Inc. of Rochester, New York, made an official presentation to employees who produced the parts that won them an award from Hughes Missile for quality components. The award was put on permanent display on the shop floor.

At First Chicago, executives designed the Service Products Group (SPG) Performance Award to develop teamwork by recognizing high-performing groups of employees each month. The reward includes a group outing-dinner, theater or sporting event-as well as a plaque for the group. All monthly winning team members attend the annual SPG Performance Banquet at which one winner from each team is selected at random to receive a gift worth \$100, and one winner receives a round-trip airfare for two anywhere in the United States, plus \$500.

A manager at the San Bruno, California-based The Gap Inc. wanted to thank everyone for working madly to meet a big deadline. She handed out gift certificates from a spa for a facial or massage. Carol Whitaker, another Gap manager said, "It was a much appreciated treat to help employees clam down and relax after a tough time."

Seven Ways to Praise Teams

By Bob Nelson

- #1 Have managers pop in at the first meeting of a special project team and express their appreciation for the members' involvement.
- #2 When a group presents an idea or suggestion, managers should thank members for their initiative.
- #3 Encourage a lunch meeting with project teams once they've made interim findings. Have managers express their appreciation. Encourage continued energy. Provide the lunch.
- #4 Promote writing letters to every team member at the conclusion of a project thanking them for their contribution.
- #5 Provide information on how the company makes and loses money, upcoming products and strategies for competing in the marketplace, and how the person fits into the overall plan.
- #6 Encourage creative symbols of a team's work, such as T-shirts or coffee cups with a motto or logo.
- #7 Have managers ask the boss to attend a meeting with the employees during which individuals and groups are thanked for their specific contributions.
- #8 Suggest catered lunches or breakfasts for high-performing groups.

Ideas such as these are limited only by a company's creativity. Managers should remember, however, that innovative ideas needn't be elaborate. To ensure that recognition activities are carried out personally and in a timely fashion, think small. Simple ideas are easier to implement, and they work.

Team recognition can pose a dilemma. The task of recognizing teams, however, differs from individual recognition and presents a dilemma: How does one affirm a team's collective effort, on the one hand, and its different individual's contributions on the other—especially when each individual effort isn't the same? For example, all members of a team seldom contribute equally to the group's work. Each member brings a different degree of skill, knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to the table. As human resources experts, you want your managers to acknowledge the performance in a way that neither undermines those who contributed the most to the team's work nor reinforces the behavior of those team members who added little or nothing to the team. Clearly, jelly bean motivation—giving equal recognition for unequal performance—is detrimental to the group's sustained productivity.

Therefore, one way to circumvent the dilemma is to be sure the team leader recognizes the achievements of individual members during group sessions and that he or she has the skills to do so effectively. To turn a group into a high-performing team, leaders must use recognition and rewards so each team member focuses on achieving the team's overall objectives. Once tangible results are attained, the members are likely to feel better about themselves and, in turn, are likely to become more productive.

In terms of rewarding teams as a whole, managers must also learn to couple individual performance with group output, according to

Deborah Crown, an assistant professor of management in the University of Alabama College of Commerce and Business Administration in Tuscaloosa. Her research shows that a combination of group-centric individual goals coupled with overall group goals results in team performance 36 percent greater than what would happen otherwise. "It might be as simple as changing to rewarding people for the percentage of goals to which they contribute," says Crown. "You're more likely to have success if you give people a goal and direct their action where you want it directed, rather than hoping over time they'll try to do the right thing because they identify with the group."

Characteristics of a high-performing team. The goal of every team leader should be to create a team that's a cohesive, interactive group whose primary mission is working together to achieve a common goal. At The Ken Blanchard Companies in Escondido, CA, they have outlined seven characteristics, depicted by the acronym PERFORM, that summarize the behaviors necessary for a group to become a high-performing team. These attributes will help team members and leaders visualize a positive working environment and will encourage them to produce better results:

- **Purpose.** Members of high-performing teams share a sense of common purpose. They have a clear understanding about the team's mission and why it's important, and know precisely what the team intends to achieve. They have developed mutually agreed upon and challenging goals that clearly relate to the team's vision. Strategies for achieving goals are clear, and each member understands his or her role in realizing the vision.
- **Empowerment.** Members are confident about the team's ability to overcome obstacles and to realize its vision. A sense of

mutual respect enables members to share responsibilities, support each other and take initiative to meet challenges. Policies, rules and team processes enable members to do their jobs easily. Members have opportunities to grow and learn new skills. There's a sense of personal as well as collective power.

- **Relationships and communication.** The team is committed to open communication, and group members feel they can state their opinions, thoughts and feelings without fear. Listening is considered as important as speaking. Differences of opinion and perspective are valued by the team, and all members understand the methods for managing conflict. Through honest and constructive feedback, members are made aware of their strengths and weaknesses. An atmosphere of trust and acceptance, and a sense of community create a cohesive group.
- **Flexibility.** Group members are flexible and perform different tasks and maintenance functions as needed. All members share the responsibility for team development and leadership. The strengths of each member are identified and used, and individual efforts are coordinated as needed. The team is fluid and open to both opinions and feelings, hard work and fun. Members recognize the inevitability and desirability of change and adapt to changing conditions.
- **Optimal productivity.** High-performing teams produce significant results because there's a commitment to high standards and quality performance. They get the job done by meeting deadlines and achieving goals. The team establishes effective decision-making and problem-solving methods that result in achieving optimum results and encourage participation and creativity. Members develop strong skills in group

process as well as task accomplishment.

- **Recognition and appreciation.** Individual and team accomplishments are frequently recognized by the team leader, as well as by team members, by celebrating milestones, accomplishments and events. Team accomplishments are valued by the entire organization. Members feel important within the team and experience a sense of personal accomplishments in relation to their team and task contributions.
- **Morale.** Members are proud to be a part of the team and are enthusiastic about its mission. Confident and committed, members are optimistic about the future. There's a sense of excitement about individual and team achievements as well as the way team members work together. Team spirit is high.

Enhance productivity and morale. Of the seven PERFORM characteristics, two are most important: optimal productivity and morale. To be a successful team, the group must have a strong ability to produce results and a high degree of satisfaction in working with one another.

Team management experience has shown that the group's overall level of productivity and morale is shaped by specific behaviors that may be performed by any member of the group. To achieve these needed behaviors, managers must either provide direction (to increase productivity) or provide support (to increase morale).

Providing direction is best given in three forms: structure, control and supervision. Remember, groups need structure, or a game plan, to make progress. It can come from a manager's agenda or from asking questions to help clarify roles and goals of the group. Once a plan is established, the group must maintain control and stick to it. This involves helping

the group focus and limit its activities—for example, limiting interruptions so members can finish stating their ideas or putting time limits on the discussion of various aspects of the agenda.

Finally, managers need to provide supervision, that is, the systematic observation, reinforcement or redirection of behaviors, which is important in shaping any behavior. For groups, this means monitoring and evaluating how the group is doing, pinpointing what it needs to reach its goals, and helping in appropriate ways. Managers can be helpful by providing additional information, making a suggestion or summarizing and recasting what still needs to be done.

Praise, listen and facilitate. To develop a team that functions well, it's also important for members to support each other. This support is communicated best in three ways: praising, listening and facilitating. Specific praise given on a timely basis has been proven repeatedly to be one of the most effective means of reinforcing desired behaviors. In a group context, praise can be given by team leaders for productive contributions such as new ideas, suggestions or factual data. Praising encourages others to be involved with the group in a positive way.

In addition, few behaviors underscore the value one places on another person as much as the ability to listen. Team members can demonstrate they've heard each other and been understood by using both verbal cues (such as paraphrasing) and nonverbal cues (such as

nodding the head).

And finally, there's the art of facilitating. Assisting with the interactions of team members can take many forms, such as leading the discussion or encouraging quiet members to contribute to the group. An effective facilitator helps move the group toward its goal in a way in which both participation and commitment to the group process are high.

Remember, the responsibility of initiating behaviors that give direction and support to the group should be shared by all members. But it's up to team leaders to develop and implement effective ways to recognize the accomplishments of the team as well as the achievements of individual team members. When this recognition occurs, the group can easily assume the other team-building characteristics needed to perform and will be well on its way to becoming a high-performing team. Only then can a group be recognized together for its successes in performing like a team.

Bob Nelson, Ph.D., president of Nelson Motivation Inc. and best-selling author of *1501 Ways to Reward Employees*, *The 1001 Ways to Energize Employees* and *The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook*. Contact Dr. Bob: bob@drbobnelson.com, 1 (858) 673-0690, www.linkedin.com/drbobnelson. Originally published in *Workforce Management*.