Boost Employee Performance Virtually

Recognition is a key component of a remote talent management strategy.

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The switch to a remote working environment has introduced many new challenges for HR leaders. Maintaining a connected culture and managing employee performance are among the most critical to business success—and with the help of an effective recognition strategy, organizations can tackle both head-on. In this Q&A, Theresa Harkins-Schulz, senior vice president of customer experience at Inspirus, shares how recognition can motivate employees while reinforcing goals and shaping positive behaviors across the workforce.

Q What is the role of recognition in talent management during the age of COVID-19?

A One of the things that COVID-19 has brought to light is that recognition is a great source of feedback and data about employee performance, especially now that the workforce is dispersed and managers can't see what their employees are doing. When we look at how people are being recognized, it gives us an opportunity to understand not only what they're doing but how they're doing it, what they're achieving, and the impact of that for others.

Recognizing small accomplishments also gives us an opportunity to lift people up and show compassion and understanding for each other during this trying time. Many companies are now encouraging a more inclusive and authentic approach to leadership, and recognition is one way that managers are pressing forward for a positive employee experience. After all, the employee experience should mirror the type of customer experience you want your employees to deliver.

Q What are some recognition metrics that might be helpful?

A When it comes to the metrics associated with recognition, some HR leaders take a survey approach where they look at people's direct feedback. But ultimately, a lot of recognition programs are focused around identifying keywords in the feedback given and received on social recognition feeds and aggregating themes in a word cloud. Are employees feeling a sense of belonging within the organization? Do they feel pride? Are they embodying the company values? Recognition data can reveal this and more, giving managers a pulse on what their employees are thinking and feeling, and what's important to them in that moment.

Q How does a good recognition program impact employee engagement?

A Employee engagement is all about discretionary effort. Recognition has an opportunity to help shape that behavior because when recognition is specific, timely, and sincere, a couple things happen:

1. employees are more likely to remember the feedback and perform that act again; and

2. they will share the feedback with their colleagues, instilling a sense of pride and modeling good behavior to others in the organization.

Recognition also builds trust between employees and business leaders. When employees see their leaders following through, taking time to notice their actions, acting with compassion, and recognizing them both as a person as well as a professional, it increases trust and enhances that relationship, ultimately driving employee engagement and the performance efforts that a person displays in the workplace.

Q What are some best practices for implementing recognition programs in a remote environment?

A Recognition needs to be very frequent, especially in a remote environment where it's more challenging to bring the team together. One best practice is to look for the opportunities that already exist within the organization and integrate recognition into daily routines. For example, leaders can bring recognition into their meeting schedules, taking time to give shoutouts to individuals that have raised the bar or given their time and attention towards something that's meaningful to the organization. Managers should also acknowledge milestones, whether it's birthdays, service anniversaries, holidays, or project completions.

Another best practice is to offer recognition and rewards that are specific to the employee's interests. In the past, having a generic approach that worked for a whole group of people was relatively easy, but now, the remote workforce demands a new level of personalization. You really have to know your employees and what they like, and the remote environment gives you a unique opportunity to do that by offering a window into their life. One of the biggest things that you can leverage to personalize recognition at this time is your creativity— I've seen everything from Door Dash deliveries to celebratory Zoom backgrounds and surprise celebrations of families and friends on Zoom meetings.

And last, one easy way managers can implement recognition in a virtual environment is by rewarding healthy habits. Whether it's drinking water, encouraging breaks, or driving mindfulness or meditation exercises, reinforcing healthy habits while working remotely can be a key element of a recognition strategy.

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