

June 1997

The Power of Positive Feedback

"You get what you reward." Bob Nelson, author of 1001 Ways to Reward Employees, made this statement during the "TRANSFORMATIONS '97" post-conference workshop, "Making Effective Use of Employee Recognition." Nelson particularly stressed the value of positive feedback, immediate recognition, informal recognition, and effective program design.

- * Positive Feedback
- * Immediate Recognition
- * Informal Recognition
- * Designing Programs

Positive Feedback. Nelson emphasized positive feedback throughout the workshop and said supervisors should remember that it can be a motivating force for some employees. He suggested that when delivering feedback or presenting informal recognition, supervisors should remember to use the "I" format:

- * I saw what you did
- * I appreciate it
- * It's important
- * It makes me feel....

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Immediate Recognition. Nelson suggested three different methods that supervisors or managers can use to give their employees immediate recognition:

- * give the praise or recognition directly to the employee;
- * give the praise while another employee is present; or
- * give the praise about the employee to another manager or supervisor.

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Informal Recognition. While on-the-spot praise is an immediate and easy method of recognizing employees' performance, Nelson noted other ways that employees could be given informal recognition. He gave several effective, low cost, and easy-to-do examples: create a wall of fame by displaying photos of achievers, give certificates of appreciation, present balloons, display computer banners, give award pins, or create a special award. Nelson said that designers of

low-cost awards programs should be creative, the award should match the achievement, and the award should be given as soon as possible after the achievement.

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Designing Programs. Nelson also gave some suggestions to follow when designing a recognition program:

- * Focus on a few areas or goals that will have the most impact. Where should you direct your recognition efforts?
- * Involve your target employee group in the design process. Employee input helps to gain employee buy-in for the new program.
- * Announce the awards program with a fanfare. Let everyone know about the program.
- * Make the program criteria clear. Make sure everyone knows about the program, its criteria, and the nomination process.
- * Publicly track the process of the program. Use graphs, charts, and pictures to show that goals are being met, to track program activity, and to show who its recipients are.
- * Have lots and lots of qualifying recipients. Make sure everyone has an equal chance to receive recognition, not just a select few.
- * Allow for flexibility and choice of rewards. Have a variety of awards so managers have several choices.
- * End or review the program as needed. If the program is not working, it is better to end it quickly and develop a new one.
- * Link informal and formal awards. Ensure that informal awards are in line with the formal awards structure; do so by making informal awards a subset of the formal awards programs already in place.
- * Find ways to sustain the behavior. Once you have rewarded employees for their efforts, look for other ways to maintain their motivation.

Nelson summarized by saying:

"While money is important to employees, what tends to motivate them to perform and to perform at higher levels is the thoughtful, personal kind of recognition

that signifies true appreciation for a job well done.

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