



Staff Recognition Month Tips

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FROM NELSON SCOTT

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Contact Nelson Scott:



(780) 433-1443



nmscott@telus.net



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Getting Started

Two-Step Staff-Recognition Plan

Step 1: Ask yourself, "Who deserves to be recognized today?"

Step 2: Recognize him/her. Be clear about why he/she is being recognized.

Create an Appreciation Log

Create an appreciation log. Divide a paper into three columns. In the first, list all your staff. In the second, note one or more tasks that the person does well and in the third, describe what you did to acknowledge the staff member. Look over your log. What does it tell you about what your staff does well and how you recognize them?

Pick Your Staff Recognition Colour

Do you have a special colour you associate with staff recognition? I do. It's green.

Whenever I write a thank-you note, I use green ink. I could give you lots of reasons for choosing green, but in the end, there are only two that really matter. It's not red (most recipients would likely remember what it meant when teachers took out their red pens) or black (which could make it appear like your message was just one of many spit out of a photocopier). Beyond those colours, the rainbow is your limit. Pick the colour (blue, purple, orange, etc.) you will use to write thank-you notes.

Set staff recognition goals, and then just do it!

What are your staff recognition goals for the next week or month? How many people do you want to recognize? What new ways do you want to try to acknowledge contributions? Now just do it!

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GREAT Staff Recognition

The acronym GREAT is a reminder of the five ingredients of staff recognition.

Recognition must be inspired by a **Genuine** sense of appreciation for what the recipient did. You strengthen this message when you make it **Relevant** (linked to the organization's values and goals), **Explicit** (including a specific description of what the recipient did

well), **Appropriate** (reflecting the recipient's interests and recognition preferences), and **Timely** (delivered soon after the actions for which the recipient is being recognized).

Recognition should also be delivered Frequently (measured in days and weeks, not months or years).



Linking Recognition to Your Organization's Values

What are the values of your organization? Can you recite them from memory? Can your staff members?

When staff recognition is linked to the organization's values (that is, when it is Relevant, one of the five ingredients of GREAT staff recognition), it reminds everyone what's important. Relevant recognition brings values to life and helps create the type of workplace you wish for.

Prepare to provide more Relevant recognition by taking a few minutes to reflect on your values. What behaviours are consistent with your commitment to teamwork? To being innovative? To providing excellent customer service?

When a staff member demonstrates one of these behaviours, express your appreciation and explain how such behaviour relates to one of the organization's values.

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Discovering What Staff Feels Should be Recognized

Distribute slips of paper to staff members. Ask them to respond anonymously to the question: "What do you do well for which you feel underappreciated?" The answers can make you more aware of contributions that staff members feel are important, but you aren't seeing (or are not commenting on).



Do You Know Staff Well Enough to Recognize Appropriately?

Use this activity to discover how well you know your staff:

Create a table, with several columns, and enough rows to list all your staff, which you will list in the first column.

Add headings to each of columns, such as hobbies/interests, favourite treats, reading preferences (favourite author/genre/magazines), charities supported, private/public (recognition preference)

Can you fill in all the cells of the table for each employee?

If you can, you are well-prepared to discover ways to recognize staff that recipients will value.

 **Here are 7 questions you can ask to discover Appropriate ways to recognize staff.**

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nmscott@telus.net



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There is nothing more unequal, than the equal treatment of unequal people."

—Thomas Jefferson
Third U.S. president

Why You Shouldn't Recognize Everyone the Same Way

Recognizing everyone the same way ignores a couple of realities of any workplace:

- People perform differently. Different people produce different results. Each person has unique strengths, meaning they perform some tasks better than others.
- People have different recognition preferences: private vs. public, a letter placed in one's personnel file vs. a handwritten thank-you card, a pat on the back vs. a coffee card, etc.

Recognition should reflect the significance and quality of the individual's contribution and their recognition preferences. To recognize all staff in the same way short-changes your top performers, inflates the value of what underperformers do and ignores the fact that the team is made up of individuals—each with his or her own recognition preferences.


Delivering Semi-Private Recognition

Should recognition be delivered publicly or in private? There's no right answer, because it depends. What are the recipients' recognition preferences? Some people are energized by being recognized before a large audience, while others are terrorized by the prospect. While it's important to discover each employee's preference, not knowing is no reason not to acknowledge contributions. You will never go wrong with recognition that's delivered in private. Even those who like others to witness their recognition still appreciate knowing that you know what they do and value their contributions.



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Saying thank you by supporting charities that staff members support

Supporting charities and causes that are important to staff members is an Appropriate way to recognize staff. It shows you know and value staff members as individuals. You know what's important to them.

The decision to support a charity is often a very personal one, motivated by a family illness or a strongly felt commitment to a cause. Your support of charities that are important to staff members creates a strong emotional connection between you and the recipients of this type of recognition.

A good way to show that you both appreciate staff members' contributions to your organization and understand the personal connection of particular staff members is to make a donation in their names to the Red Cross, the local food bank or United Way, or agencies working with people in developing or war-torn countries.

Appropriate Recognition Sends Two Messages

When you recognize staff in ways that reflect their recognition preferences (ensuring your gesture of appreciation is Appropriate, which is one of the five ingredients of GREAT staff recognition), and includes a specific description of what the recipient did (making it Explicit), you are sending two messages:

- You are valued, both as a person and as a staff member.
- What you do—how you contribute and what you achieve—is appreciated.



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No Statute of Limitations on Recognition

Most of us, at one time or another, have failed to give people recognition when we should have, which is soon after becoming aware that they had done a task well. We may have been distracted by other duties and now it seems too late to recognize the person. While recognition should be Timely, there is no statute of limitations on recognition. Better late than never. What's important is that it's motivated by a Genuine sense of appreciation. You can then strengthen your message by including at least one other ingredient of GREAT staff recognition: make it Relevant, Explicit or Appropriate.



Service Awards


Rethink Service Rewards!

It's time to change the model of how years of service are celebrated. Service awards are typically bestowed on staff at five-year intervals during a once-a-year event, characterized by formality and lots of speeches which praise everyone for nothing specific. This one-size-fits-all approach likely doesn't work for most of today's workforce. It's too impersonal, and too long a time to wait to be acknowledged. If you are going to continue to recognize service, do so annually on the staff member's actual employment anniversary. Rather than hold a formal event, do something that will be meaningful for the recipient—a one-on-one lunch, a special treat with the team during a break, a small gift that the recipient will value. Most importantly, say something to highlight the ways in which the recipient has contributed over the past year which earned your appreciation.



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Simple, Cost-Effective Staff Recognition Techniques

Sticky Recognition

Keep a collection of different-coloured, differently shaped sticky notes on your desk to quickly say thank you, congratulations or well done. Your words can be attached to many surfaces: computer screens, desks, well-written reports, relevant newspaper or magazine articles.


Related Article:

 **Making Recognition Stick: How to Use Sticky Notes as a Recognition Tool.**

Help Staff Achieve Career Goals

When you know staff members' career goals (a question that should be asked, but only of people who have been hired), you position yourself to recognize staff by letting them know about opportunities they might not know about that fit with their career goals.

Related Article:

 **Don't ask about career goals until after you hire.**

Time to Innovate

Release the staff member from routine duties for a few hours or a few days to pursue a special project of her own design. This could be an idea for a new product or service, the need to discover a way to remove an obstacle that gets in the way of success, or development of a new procedure to improve customer service or increase efficiency. Provide an opportunity to present the results of her special work to co-workers or management.

Make Parents Your Staff-Retention Allies

Send a note to the mothers and fathers whose children are now your staff members. Let them know how much you appreciate the specific ways their offspring contribute. Congratulate them for the good job they did in raising a person with whom you are proud to work. It won't take long for your praise to get back to your staff members. As a bonus, you may even be creating staff-retention allies. The next time your staff member says it's time to look for a similar job elsewhere, a parent who recalls your words may ask, "Why would you leave a place where you are appreciated?"

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Give Staff Your Full Attention

A comment made by Ottawa-based speaker Steve Lowell during his program at the 2014 national convention of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers has helped me clarify my advice about how time spent with individuals and work teams is a powerful staff-recognition technique. Steve suggested it's not how much time we spend with people that's important. It's the attention we pay to people while we are with them. It's not enough to drop by their workspaces to simply say hello, or to join them for coffee in the break room but spend the time checking emails on your smartphone. It's about providing specific feedback on what they have done. It's about asking what they think and listening to their responses. It's about allowing them to set the agenda, discussing topics of interest to them, whether it is work-related, or focused on their favourite sports team or how they spent their last vacation.

Related links:

-  [Steve Lowell](#)
-  [Canadian Association of Professional Speakers](#)

Recognize Staff when You Delegate

Delegation can become a form of staff recognition. Think about why you assign tasks to certain individuals, but not to others. It's because you have confidence in them. You have seen how well they have handled similar tasks, which were well done and completed on time.

Do they understand this? Are you letting them know that what you're asking them to do is important and that you believe they are the right people, based on their previous performance?


Tasks can also be delegated based on what the staff member will learn by working on a new task. Explain that the task you want them to complete will enable them to gain new knowledge and skills that may move them closer to achieving their career goals.

Fire up the Barbeque

Intentionally or not, whoever gave May the dual designation of National Barbeque Month and National Hamburger Month provides a hint to managers that they could acknowledge staff by hosting a noon-hour barbeque in the company parking lot.

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Recognition for a Hot Day

If what the team does requires its members to work outdoors on hot summer days, let them know that they are appreciated by showing up with a cooler filled with cold drinks—nonalcoholic, of course, because it is a work day—or ice-cream treats. If your team works indoors, invite members outside during their break, where you can serve them cold drinks or ice cream. Or stay indoors, setting up a make-your-own sundae station in the break room.

Recognize by Spending Time with Staff

Sharing your time with staff can be a powerful way to show that people are valued as individuals and appreciated for what they do. Rather than sending an email or text, or even a handwritten note, deliver your message in person. Go to the recipients' work stations to acknowledge their contributions. Don't return to your office right away. Stay to visit, with no agenda except to get to know them better. Give them your full attention. Perhaps ask a question to get the conversation going and then just listen. How is the job going? What is your No.1 frustration at work and how could it be removed? What do you like to do when you're not at work? What are your interests and hobbies?

Prepare for Post-Vacation Recognition

You have discovered that George made an important contribution just prior to his leaving for a vacation trip. You know he won't be back for two weeks. What should you do? Prepare to recognize him when he returns. Add a reminder to your calendar to speak to him, including a description of what he did. Lots will happen while he is away, which could interfere with your ability to remember the details of what he did. Your specific description of what he did will help you provide Explicit recognition (one of the ingredients of GREAT staff recognition).

 [Click here for 7 vacation-related staff recognition tips.](#)

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Peer Recognition

3 Ways Staff Can Recognize their Peers

Usually prior to Peer Recognition Day, which falls on the third Tuesday each month I suggest ways in which supervisors and managers can encourage staff members to recognize co-workers. The following tips are meant specifically for those staff members—ideas they can use to recognize their colleagues:

- Leave an awesome recommendation on a colleague's LinkedIn profile.
- Send an all-staff email, explaining what a colleague did that you appreciated.
- Create a certificate to hang on a colleague's wall as a way of recognizing him/her as your co-worker of the day, week, month or year. Include a description of what he/she did.


Please share these suggestions with your staff.

Related Article:

 [What is Peer Recognition Day and why is important?](#)



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 nmscott@telus.net

 www.GREATstaffrecognition.com

Staff Recognition Beginning on Day One

Begin to Recognize on Day One

When should you recognize a new staff member for the first time? As a rule, no person should leave after the first day on the job without having heard words of praise. Make a point of finding a reason to recognize new staff members of their first day. It should be part of your strategy to build commitment, beginning on Day 1. Observe what the new person does. Did he master a new skill? Was there a positive encounter with a customer? How did she relate to co-workers? The reason may be small, but the impact of your gesture may be huge. "The boss cares. The boss notices what I do. I feel valued for who I am and appreciated for what I do. This may turn out to be the right place to work."

P.S. Recognizing a new person on Day 1 is just the beginning. Keep the recognition coming and you will be taking an important step towards improving staff retention. No one wants to have a new staff member who decides to become a short-term employee.

 **Seven ways to build commitment on your employees' first day**

Related Article:

 **Advice to Hire Slow and Fire Fast is Incomplete.**


Recognition for the First Time is Best Delivered in Private

Where should you recognize a staff member for the first time? The answer is to recognize staff for the first time in private, because you don't know how the new staff member will respond to recognition. He may be okay with public recognition, but not everyone is. Being recognized in public, especially in front of people he has just met, may make him uncomfortable. Creating an experience that the recipient finds excruciating will overpower the feeling of feeling appreciated that you hoped to create.

Another advantage of delivering the recognition privately is that it may lead to a conversation about the day (How did the new employee feel about her first day? What did the new employee learn? What questions does she have about the job?), or about how she prefers to be recognized.

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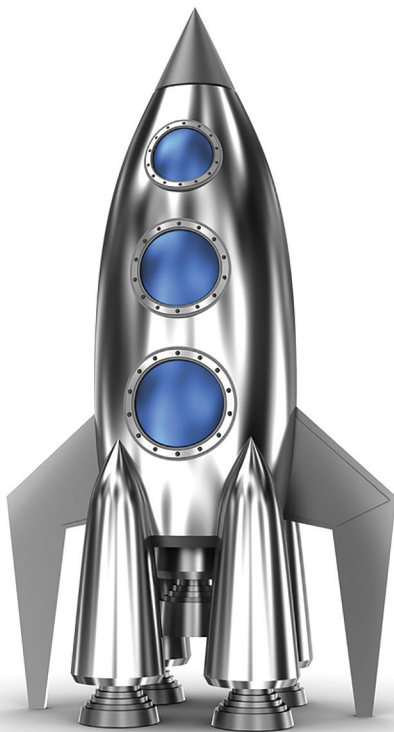
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Recognition with a Smile

Here are a few fun ways to convey your serious message of appreciation:

- Acknowledge someone who is willing to “stick her neck out” with a stuffed toy giraffe.
- A toolbox lets someone who is always able to “fix” everything when things go wrong know that his efforts are appreciated.
- A toy rocket ship will remind a staff member of a time when she “launched” an idea that “really took off.”
- A kaleidoscope could be used to celebrate the contributions that changed chaos into a thing a beauty.



Fun Way to Acknowledge Someone Who's Full of Ideas

A PEZ candy dispenser is a lighthearted way to acknowledge a staff member who seems to dispense great advice every time she opens her mouth. Be sure to provide specific examples of her great ideas. Add impact by selecting a PEZ dispenser that reflects her interests—a favourite cartoon character, movie experience or superhero.

Recognition as a Comic Strip

The first comic strip appeared in the New York World newspaper in 1895. You may not be a Charles Shultz or Scott Adams, but that doesn't mean that you can't draw a stickman cartoon strip to show how a staff member contributed in a way which you feel made a difference.

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Delivering Negative Feedback in a Culture of Appreciation

How to Deliver Negative Feedback in a Culture of Appreciation

Unless you live in a workplace Utopia somewhere, managing others is not always going to be about recognizing work done well. There will be times, hopefully only a few, when you will need to provide negative feedback—a staff member's performance has slipped below expectations, a work habit is unacceptable.

Here are a few suggestions about providing this feedback while maintaining a positive workplace culture:

- Focus on the behaviour you observe and avoid interpreting what this means about the employee's attitude. Ask for the person's input. What could he do to improve his performance? Agree to what needs to change and set a timeline for improvement.
- You may have heard that you should "sandwich criticism between two layers of praise." This is bad advice, which you should ignore. Using recognition to buffer bad news diminishes the impact of future recognition. If you use the "sandwich technique," staff receiving recognition will begin to wait for the "other shoe to drop."
- Once the employee and you agree to a course of improvement, express confidence that the employee will be successful in changing his behaviour, based on how he has improved his performance or learned new skills in the past.
- When the employee achieves the desired improvement, recognize him for what he has done to improve.



Want more staff recognition tips?

[Click here to view the 2015 Staff Recognition Month tips.](#)

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nmsscott@telus.net



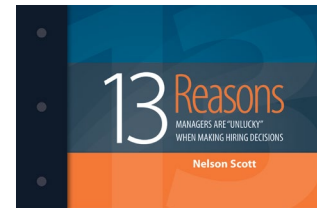
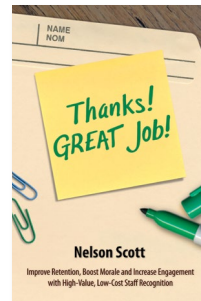
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Introducing Nelson Scott...

Since becoming a full-time consultant, speaker, trainer and facilitator in 1995, Nelson Scott has worked with managers, supervisors and administrators who are committed to hiring the right people and retaining, motivating and engaging them using high-value, low-cost staff recognition. Through his presentations and writing Nelson challenges people to build on what they already know, to make the right hiring decisions and to acknowledge employees for what they achieve and how they contribute to the organization's success.

Nelson has conducted more than 3,000 interviews, hired hundreds of people and made more hiring mistakes than he cares to admit. He has trained thousands of managers and supervisors from a variety of public, private and not-for-profit organizations on how to use interviews to gather high-quality information on which to base their hiring decisions. He also works with clients to develop interview questions, to prepare them to conduct interviews, and to manage the selection process on their behalf.

When a participant in a day-long workshop on conducting interviews asked, "How do we keep them once they're hired?" Nelson responded, "Let them know that they are appreciated. Recognize them for what they achieve and how they help your organization succeed." That brief encounter was the beginning of Nelson's decade-long journey to discover how to provide meaningful staff recognition. It has led him to develop two workshops and several shorter keynote/




breakout presentations, and to write a book, ***Thanks! GREAT Job! Improve Retention, Boost Morale and Increase Engagement with High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition.*** Nelson also wrote an e-book, ***13 Reasons Managers Are "Unlucky" When Making Hiring Decisions.***

Nelson is a former president of the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a member of Recognition Professionals International (formerly the National Association for Employee Recognition.) He is also a Rotarian who has served as president of three clubs.

A partial list of Nelson's clients include more than 20 school systems in Alberta and British Columbia, the Northern Lights Health Region, the Palliser Health Region, several chambers of commerce, Sturgeon County, Suncor Energy, Syncrude Canada, Finning, Keyano College, NorQuest College, the Awards and Personalization Association (formerly the Awards and Recognition Association), the Recognition Round Table and the Employee Attraction and Retention Network (EARN).

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