

# Connecting Recognition to Brand Values

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## Executive Summary

Connecting employee behaviors to corporate culture and brand values is critical to the success of any company in today's marketplace. Leaders want employees at every level to embrace the company's brand values and to be able to clearly understand how their particular roles help make the corporate vision and mission actionable. At the same time, employees need to understand how their individual behaviors help create the culture that delivers the brand promise to the customer. By definition, a large part of designing an employee incentive, rewards, or recognition program is focused on productivity, compensation, and profitability. An equal part of the strategy, however, needs to be centered on how the particular recognition and rewards tie back to core business values and embody the brand promise. In this paper, we will focus on cultivating desired behaviors through recognition and rewards in order to help build a culture that better connects to the brand.

## Core Values + Behaviors = Living the Brand

The specific type of business and core values help dictate the exact employee behaviors that are desirable and need to be encouraged. Those core values provide the basis for defining the company brand both

internally and externally. How well leaders and employees actually "live" the behaviors prescribed by the core values will help determine the extent to which the brand is sustained. For the sake of discussion, we will focus on some behaviors that have wide appeal and discuss how appropriately-designed recognition and rewards programs can help foster that behavior and, ultimately, help to reinforce the brand.

## Innovation

Innovation requires that people get engaged beyond their job descriptions, goals, and daily activities. It requires that employees understand not only what they do each day, but also what others in the organization do and how process improvements can impact relationships and performance. Many times, people with innovative ideas are viewed as a threat by their peers because people fear the uncertainty of change. Because innovation and the change that it brings are important to future growth, recognizing people for 'bright ideas' can help promote a more open and collaborative culture that promotes growth. Today's rewards and recognition programs can be designed to encourage participation and foster a more openly accepting culture that values innovation. From a 'suggestion box' to peer-based

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recognition, to Spot Awards, and an actual 'Spotlight On...' approach, the kind words people share as part of such programs can help inspire the self-confidence and creativity that encourages innovation.

## Respect

When your corporate value is respect, you need to assure that any award, recognition, or reward also demonstrates respect. If you choose to hold employees in a position of esteem or honor, you may want to use a 'Winner's Circle' to talk about the best practices of top performers. When you use sales promotions, contests, or instant awards, you show employees that the company respects their efforts and achievements. When people are allowed to 'collect' their accolades, much like they would in Social Media games like Farmville, the volume and depth of respect and recognition gets shared with existing peers, managers, and new employees. You also convey a sense of respect by listening to employee ideas, appreciating milestones of service and achievement, communicating success

through leader and message boards, and recognizing behaviors that contribute to a positive work place. In the end, you may even want to select a recognition solution that offers a Manager's Toolbox of automated reminders-- because building a sense of respect starts with remembering.

### Safety

In many companies, focusing on safety can preclude serious injury and/or life and death for employees and/or customers. The commitment to a safety mindset is imperative, whether in procedures, facilities, awareness, precautions, or regulatory requirements. Recognizing safety achievements, whether in teams or as individuals, helps raise awareness of how much you value safe behavior. Your investment in rewarding safety-conscious activities can do much more than protect against litigation; it can help prevent loss and injury, and even save lives. As business pressures mount from other areas, or as morale is undermined by external factors, keeping safety top-of-mind can be a positive and uplifting experience for the entire corporate culture, with rewards and recognition demonstrating successes that provide solid evidence of the value the company puts on its people.

### Integrity

In order to promote integrity, actions that portray integrity must be identified and rewarded on the spot. When employees ask the right questions or make suggestions that show they believe in ethical behavior, you can use a Spot Reward as a way of highlighting the importance of such behavior. You can also measure cumulative Spot Rewards to help decide on your Employee of the Month. In robust reward systems, points earned by individuals through their activities can be counted towards overall performance reviews. You will also want to make sure

that your employees know that integrity gets rewarded. You can promote extraordinary behaviors through internal (and even external) communications as a way of spotlighting the correlation between desired behavior and the company's brand values. An e-newsletter or 'Spotlight On...' section of your web site is a great way to shout SUCCESS.

### Customer-Focus

Operationally, it costs much more to win a new customer than it does to keep an existing customer, so your bottom line can be severely damaged by customer churn. More than the old adage, "The customer is always right," a customer-focused culture requires that your people proactively work towards ensuring that customers are satisfied. In truth, good customer service virtually implies anticipating customer issues before they arise. By recognizing and rewarding outstanding customer-focused employees, you clearly demonstrate to all the importance of the kind of behavior that focuses on exceeding customer expectations.

Choosing awards and rewards that are meaningful to the employee always makes a difference. In the case of customer-focused behavior, it clearly demonstrates your level of caring in much the same way that their level of caring resulted in customer satisfaction and retention. When considering the cost for rewarding the saving of a customer, be sure to look at the Lifetime Value of that customer's business--the overall cost to earn the business, the cost of operations, and the cost of marketing and sales—and you'll find that the reward for outstanding customer-focused behaviors should be one of your top priorities. Depending on your industry, you may not be allowed to reward a customer for being loyal. But you can always reward your team member who valued the relationship

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enough to deliver on a customer-centric brand promise.

### Quality

Just as quality metrics can vary from company to company (quality of research, education, service, manufacturing, materials; reduced rejection rates; and improved satisfaction, responsiveness, presentation, preparation, ideas, thoroughness, and speed), so too can the mechanisms for recognizing quality, depending on the audience. One way a company can support quality behaviors is to be certain that the rewards presented to employees for their quality achievements also demonstrate quality standards. For instance, it would be inappropriate to present a shoddy plaque to the person who is being recognized for quality in his/her performance. It would be equally unacceptable to present a quality award with little or no preparation. As a rule, people appreciate the quality in name-brand merchandise or gift cards, and even travel destinations (as long as every aspect of the trip has the same attention to detail).

Sometimes, the quality of the reward can be tied to the corporate role of the recipient. For example, executives might prefer to make a donation to a charity of personal importance. Your sales team might already be jet-setting to exotic destinations and the last thing they need is more travel. But they might appreciate tickets to a show or a dinner out. For others, the opposite may be true. Because they don't get the opportunity to travel, they may see individual travel rewards as an exclusive opportunity to live the 'lifestyles of the rich and famous.' When quality is measured by incremental improvements, you may want to use tactics such as 'Bright Ideas' and peer-to-peer or supervisor recognition to help build momentum around incremental achievements that can lead to overall quality improvements.

### **Growth**

If growth is a core value of the company, look for recognition solutions that highlight achievements in those areas. Depending on the type, solutions can allow for cumulative, cross-pooling of points to demonstrate an individual's growth and increase the value of the reward. Some people will collect points for the sake of having a lot to show... others will cash them in as they achieve specific levels. Still others will save points for a big ticket item. Look for a system that keeps a record of achievements and allows participation to reflect the individual's personal style. You can choose a solution that tracks sales achievements, referrals, ideas, education and learning, safety consciousness, wellness goals, and even kudos from managers and other employees. Your solution should be flexible to allow for attributes that match the growth goals of individuals with the growth goals of your company.

### **Sustainability**

The sustainability of an organization is nourished by engaged people. Engagement is sustained by a broad belief within a company that the company cares about its people... and caring happens when the recognition resonates as being sincere and meaningful. Motivation and performance techniques offer a continuous spectrum of ways to engage and inspire internal audiences around the issue of sustainability. You can start with a paperless recognition system or use an online communications to encourage the behaviors that actually support sustainability for your company and culture. A sustainable system allows for flexibility in rewards that are current and genuine. You will want to choose a solution that allows for integration of meaningful aspects for sustainability, such as wellness, milestones, and referrals (whether employee generated or via channel or partners). Getting referrals for business or new employees sustains your company. Rewarding participation helps keep employees and partners engaged, which ultimately reduces turnover and improves continuity and sustainability. Rewards and recognition solutions offer robust reporting capabilities that allow program managers to see the effectiveness of various approaches and to understand what resonates with employees.

### **Behaviors and the Brand**

Creating and sustaining the company brand is not easy. It requires defining the brand by way of an organization's mission and core values. The core values need to be tied to desired behaviors. As suggested above, those behaviors can be encouraged and perpetuated through effectively designed recognition and rewards. When they successfully engage employees in the desired behaviors,



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recognition and rewards actually help to promote the brand. The secret lies in finding the appropriate approach.

### **Team Approach**

Team recognition programs can be used as a strategic business component to drive performance by having divisions and regions compete. Friendly competition builds camaraderie within a business unit. When setting up a team competition program, it is important to make sure that the metrics established balance with the program criteria in order to have fair and productive internal engagement. Customer satisfaction, rate of cross-selling success, or any other form of team measurement can be recognized through timely leader board postings. By leveraging peer-to-peer and manager recognition, along with 'thanks' rewards, you can highlight visible evidence of teammates helping each other. You can also set plateau milestones for a team that can be celebrated with collective success team rewards, or individual rewards. If you want to single out an 'elite team,' you might consider offering group travel for



successful sales teams or for select project teams that lead the way in 'living the brand values.'

### Winning

At most companies, winning is a priority. These highly competitive cultures benefit from employee engagement solutions that perpetuate a culture based on 'drive.' Look for programs that feature on-demand Key Performance Indicators to help you gauge effectiveness and engagement. Look for solutions that can support continuous programs, as well as programs that can compare the metrics of one engagement vs. prior engagements and are able to adjust for variations such as number of participants, weighting by region, season, promotional offers, experience of sales reps, etc. With a robust sales elevation solution, you can monitor, reward, and recognize monthly performance, exemplary moments, and contest winners.

Regardless of the approach that you choose, you will need to find one that tracks and measures results to help demonstrate progress and momentum around the results that you are trying to achieve.

### Conclusion

Keeping brand values top of mind is difficult when employees are mired in the details of their day-to-day work functions. A strategic employee incentive, rewards, and recognition program can be seamlessly interwoven with those daily activities to bolster the specific behaviors that add meaning to your performance and culture—and, consequently, promote your brand. The evolving psychology of motivation is influenced by many factors. You need to choose a solution provider who is experienced in the strategic planning, implementation and fulfillment of rewards and recognition. When you choose the

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right partner, you will be able to focus on your brand values so that your recognition solutions provide meaningful experiences and add to your brand performance.

The Performance Improvement Council (PIC), a professional organization of performance marketing executives is a special industry group of the Incentive Marketing Association ([www.incentivemarketing.org](http://www.incentivemarketing.org)), is collectively focused on helping companies optimize their investment in human capital through proven and innovative reward and recognition solutions. To learn more about the Performance Improvement Council, please visit <http://www.thepicnow.org>