President's Corner

Giving YOU recognition

In my own environment, it's that time of the year again where we purposefully, and in detail, give recognition to our team members that have gone above and beyond the call of duty. In the SAIMM it's also that time of year where the current President reflects on the year that has passed and plans a seamless handover to the next President. While I was busy with these reflections, I realized that it is always about the team, about the support the team members give each other and their work to create a safe space for innovation to flourish.

It is therefore no surprise (for me, at least) that I dedicate this article to the people that make it happen. With this article, I want to encourage everyone, no matter where you are, to help build a culture of recognition, to share with everyone why recognition is so extremely important.

Humans have a natural psychological need for respect; to this I want to add validation, extrinsic recognition, and the knowledge that they matter, that they are seen. The acknowledgement of efforts and a job well done creates a sense of fulfilment, achievement, and belonging (*The Power of Employee Recognition*, Ramin Edmond[1]). I think extrinsic recognition has the power to dictate our perception of who we are and what our value is.

Why is external recognition so important?

Some of the data I found shows that, for example, among university students 15.6% of excellence award recipients originally wanted to withdraw their enrolment but were motivated to continue after recognition. Also, 92% of workers were inclined to repeat a specific action after receiving recognition for it (Bright Ewuru[2]). The data shows concepts like more job satisfaction, better performance, higher productivity, more engagement, reduced stress, and less absenteeism. There is also substantial evidence for the correlation between recognition and competition for talent. Close to a quarter of senior leaders say finding talent is one of the biggest challenges they're faced with as managers (McKinsey and Company). High-recognition companies have '31% lower voluntary turnover than companies with poor recognition cultures' (*Deloitte Review*, Issue 16[3]).
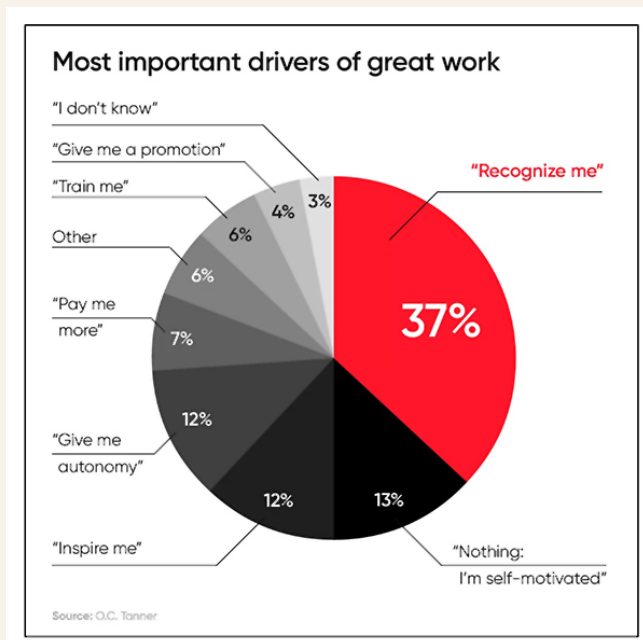

Most important drivers of great work

"I don't know" — 3%
"Give me a promotion" — 4%
"Train me" — 6%
Other — 6%
"Pay me more" — 7%
"Give me autonomy" — 12%
"Inspire me" — 12%
"Nothing: I'm self-motivated" — 13%
"Recognize me" — 37%

Source: O.C. Tanner

Figure 1–Taken from Claire Hastwell, co-author of Women in the Workplace, Creating a Culture of Recognition (**https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/creating-a-culture-of-recognition**)

[1]https://blog.gaggleamp.com/the-power-of-recognition
[2]https://www.awardforce.com/blog/articles/the-remarkable-power-of-recognition/
[3]https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/deloitte-review/issue-16/employee-engagement-strategies.html

Quantifying the benefits

The remarkable power of recognition lies in the plethora of benefits it offers.

1. Recognition creates greater employee engagement; 53% of employees will stay longer in a company if they feel appreciated, 53% will be more focused on their work, and 59% more engaged in their work.

2. Morale boost, improved performance and productivity. A genuine 'thank you' can ignite a 69% increase in the likelihood of employees bringing extra effort to their work. Compared to those who do not consistently feel recognized at work, people who do feel recognized are twice as likely to say that people [in their organization] are willing to go above and beyond. Companies with engaged employees are 21% more profitable because their employees are 17% more productive (Gallup).

3. Increased employee retention. A lack of employee recognition is the most common reason why people leave their jobs (Gallup). When people feel recognized and valued, they're more likely to be happy with their jobs and stay with their organization. Just 37% of US workers say they're happy with how much they get recognized and acknowledged at work, making it one of the most disappointing factors for workers (The Conference Board).

4. Innovation, innovation, innovation! Recognition spurs innovation. Compared to those who do not consistently feel recognized at work, people who do feel recognized are 2.2 times more likely to drive innovation and bring new ideas forward (Figure 2).

5. With a healthy recognition culture, team members are 2.6 times more likely to think that promotions are fair (Figure 2). During the Trust Index™ survey, when asked what makes their workplace 'great', employees who responded positively to survey questions (measuring recognition) said that they were 'incredibly lucky' that the company had 'excellent integrity' and an 'uplifting environment', and some mentioned their 'career success'. Conversely, employees who didn't feel recognized at work responded to the same question with phrases such as 'plays favouritism' and 'popularity contest'.

These benefits are summarized from work done by Bright Ewuru, 12 October 2022; *The Power of Employee Recognition*, Ramin Edmond, 28 November 2022; *Creating a Culture of Recognition*, Claire Hastwell, 2 March 2023; *5 ways to harness the power of recognition*, by Michele McGovern, 21 April 2023; *The Energy Project; and Harvard Business Review*. They are also based on the Great Place To Work® Trust Index™ survey, *Great Place To Work*, which analysed 1.7 million employee survey responses gathered between 2018 and 2020 across small, mid-sized, and large companies.
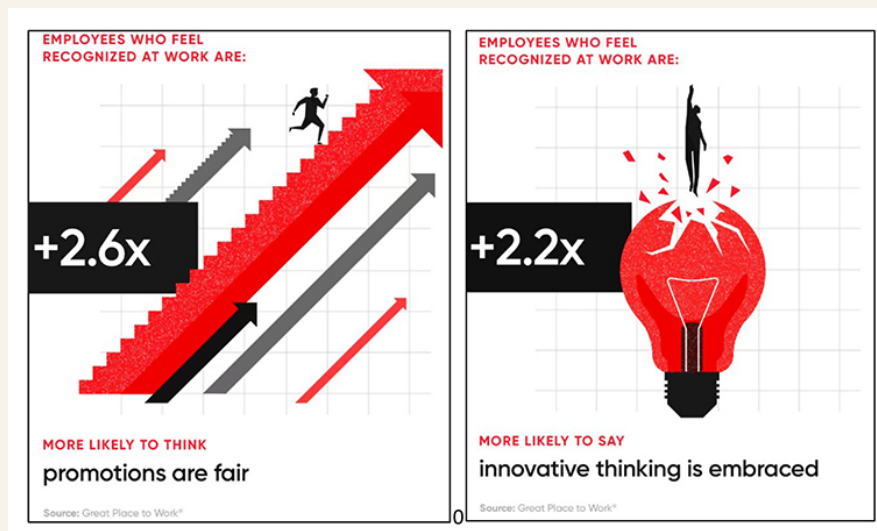

Figure 2–Taken from Claire Hastwell, co-author of Women in the Workplace, Creating a Culture of Recognition (https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/creating-a-culture-of-recognition)

What should recognition look like?

Here are a few best practices from the literature.

1. Define the goals of the employee recognition programme. Why do you want to implement a culture of recognition? Think about standards in your organization, promoting a culture of appreciation and respect, boosting employee retention or enhancing your brand.

President's Corner *(continued)*

2. Share the criteria. It's essential to bring every team member on board. If the company leaders demonstrate enthusiasm for the programme and exhibit commendable behaviours, team members will follow.

3. Be very clear and specific about the criteria; be transparent about what you want to reward and how employees can achieve it. Clarifying the rules maintains the integrity of the employee reward programme and gives your team members a good idea of where they need to focus their efforts. Also, recognition is more meaningful when tied to a specific accomplishment or business objective. Refer to an exact action, behaviour, or idea and how it positively affected colleagues, a project, the company, *etc*. Try to cite the exact time and place it happened. Then focus heavily on the positive impact it will continue to have on the external factors. When being specific, attempt to connect to the bigger picture.

4. Determine frequency. According to a study conducted by Deloitte, 85% of professionals want to hear 'thank you' in daily interactions. The regular provision of rewards and praise fosters a culture of appreciation while increasing employees' zeal and motivation. The key to having a positive impact is consistency and honesty. It's critical for any manager to schedule time and resources to honour a culture of recognition. Also consider being timeous – recognition that arrives months after the fact isn't nearly as meaningful as recognition received promptly. The longer it takes for managers to recognize employees, the less likely employees will see the affirmations as authentic.

5. If you're running a multi-faceted programme or simply want to manage your recognition programme more effectively, consider employee recognition software. This can help you organize your programme, easily accept and judge nominations in one easy hub, and streamline your entire management process. AI, machine learning, and advanced analytics give us greater insight than we've ever had into employees' diverse needs, interests, and behaviours. There are AI tools that can analyse keywords and emojis sent via office instant messaging platforms to get a feel for the team's overall morale. Other tools can track a combination of real-time job performance, feedback from employees, and surveys to pinpoint which employees are deserving of recognition. The global hotel chain Hilton provides managers with an annual Recognition Calendar that features 365 no-cost and low-cost, easy-to-implement ideas for thanking employees. The calendar includes reminders and tips for enterprise-wide brand, and department recognition programsmes, appreciation best practices, important dates like International Housekeeping Week, and recognition quotes to share with employees. It also allows users to add employee service anniversaries and local events. Users can download a print-friendly PDF or import an Outlook-friendly file into their personal calendars.

6. Recognition goes up, down, and sideways. By encouraging rewards and recognition throughout the organization you create and reinforce a culture of appreciation. It also increases the number of opportunities for employees to receive recognition by widening the pool of potential recognizers. Examples from the literature are the software company Atlassian with their Kudos programme, the law firm Alston & Bird LLP, which uses its quarterly newsletter to share the ways that team members are engaging with the surrounding community, and Ally Financial's 'I am an Ally' award programme, which invites team members to nominate colleagues for their contributions and impact.

7. Operationalize and socialize recognition. Schedule a point on regular meeting agendas for employees to thank their colleagues. Or perhaps install a virtual bulletin board where employees can celebrate their co-workers' successes. This also encourages internal communication. Let them know you want them to speak up and share ideas, then give them credit for when their ideas make an impact. Employees who feel their voices are heard are 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered and perform their best work (Salesforce).

8. Assess the programme's effectiveness. After all is said and done, you should gauge the outcome of your employee recognition programme. The assessment process can measure such areas as employee retention, morale, engagement, and productivity. If there is a lack in any area, it will be revealed and necessary adjustments can then be made.

There is considerable information on the power of recognition out there; therefore, my question is: what resources are your organization utilizing to encourage a culture of recognition?

And then, something I am looking forward to immensely is our own two sessions where we would like to give recognition to everyone that makes the SAIMM great. Please join us for our TP Cocktail Evening and our SAIMM AGM. I look forward to recognizing everyone that makes the SAIMM a family!

Z. Botha
President, SAIMM