



REWARDS TO REMEMBER

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A lot of otherwise exceptional recognition opportunities come undone at the point of delivery. Organizations devote time, money and effort to recognizing employee achievement, yet when it comes to presenting the award, the opportunity to add meaning and impact is often lost. For example, a top engineer receives an achievement award for technical excellence, which is presented to her by the CEO at a quarterly managers' luncheon. The CEO knows little or nothing about the person and, as the award is presented, has to read the recipient's name from the plaque as he meets her for the first time.

Is this recognition? Yes. Is it meaningful recognition? Probably not.

Executives attuned to the power of recognition know moments like these are ripe with the potential for creating lasting impact – and not just for the employee being honored, but for everyone present as well. How can executives make the most of situations like these? Here are some tips for getting the most out of your next award presentation.

Do your homework. Find out about the individual being honored and the achievement attained. Did the employee personally go down to the factory floor and help others in the machine shop mill a new part? Did he or she take the initiative to assemble an internal focus group to think through an idea or refine a process? When the prototype budget was exhausted, did he or she continue efforts at home in the garage? What obstacles were overcome against all odds? Doing a little homework on the individual and his or her accomplishments can provide the data upon which powerful recognition is built. Specifics become data points that add credibility to the award and the celebration.

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Personalize your praise. The best forms of recognition are personalized to the individual being honored and to the achievement. Stories add flair to the occasion; they inspire others to emulate the person being honored. If you give out plaques, for example, share stories about the honorees that give everyone insight into the value of the award. Have the president of your company meet with the honorees at a luncheon prior to the awards ceremony so he or she can get to know them and learn specific details about their accomplishments. Consider a personal note to the award recipient or a card signed by everyone in the employee's work group to create an added memento of the occasion.

Provide a Context. An important way to add value to any recognition award is to provide a larger context for the achievement. For example, tie the recognition to the organization's values, the company's strategic objectives or the sense of teamwork you have been trying to build over the past year. How does the person or achievement represent the organization's values? Did the achievement exemplify innovation, customer responsiveness or other key organizational objectives? Will the achievement result in a new product line, more appreciative clients, ongoing cost savings or other significant goals? By explicitly making the connection to larger objectives, you add value to the award and the person being honored. You might say something like, "We're able to have this celebration because, once again, we had a great year and we could not have done it without the dedication and commitment of the people in this room." Recognition isn't just for the person being honored, it's for everyone else as well, so take the time to create meaning that everyone can relate to.

Share your feelings. When presenting awards, let people know how you feel about their achievements. By showing emotion, executives provide energy and meaning to the occasion. For example, "John, I'm proud of the job you've done. You deserve this award. You inspire us and remind us that with well-placed effort, our goals are obtainable." If you express your positive feelings in an honest and sincere way, it adds power to the moment.

Have Fun! The best award celebrations are events that garner excitement and anticipation. The same old recognition activities tend to lose their punch with each use, so consider doing something different that creates a buzz. Have your executive team serve dinner or perform skits that recreate highlights of the year's successes. Use a game show theme for the celebration. Set up a casino night for the awards celebration or a charity event for everyone to volunteer to work on a special project or go on a field trip of some type that gets everyone excited. I know one upper manager who made up certificates of achievement, then read the achievement to his group and had them try and guess who was receiving each certificate. This turned a staid and tradition recognition activity into a fun game that everyone enjoyed.

These principles hold true whether you are presenting an award at an end-of-year awards banquet or at a departmental staff meeting.

A little forethought and planning can make an award presentation both effective and memorable. The effort you expend will have an impact that creates a return lasting well into the future.