

Show Me the Honey

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON



Have you noticed that the best leaders apply common sense principles about life to the challenges of influencing others? On the other hand, the least effective leaders seemingly ignore these principles in an attempt to satisfy their need for power.

Take recognition, for instance. I grew up hearing variations of Benjamin Franklin's quote, "A spoonful of honey will catch more flies than a gallon of vinegar." My guess is that you did, too.

Recognition – the honey in a leadership relationship – is important. And it does not occur at the level or quality that is needed to engage and inspire. According to a study from the O.C. Tanner Recognition Company, 79 percent of employees who voluntarily left their jobs cited the lack of appreciation as one of the primary reasons. In North America, 65 percent of employees claimed they had received no recognition in the past year.

WHY LEADERS DON'T GIVE RECOGNITION

Why do we see so little honey (and so much vinegar) from our leaders? The five reasons leaders cite for not giving recognition are:

- Don't have time to recognize their team or believe that giving recognition takes time away from other important activities.
- Believe their team is or should be self-motivated.
- See their job as fixing what's wrong rather than building on what's right.
- Don't see how recognition has an immediate impact on completing the work that needs to be accomplished today.
- Like the idea of recognition but are not sure how to provide it without sounding insincere.

While there is an element of truth to each of these reasons, the best leaders don't allow those slivers of truth to stand in the way of recognizing others.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE RECOGNITION

The leader's job is to build an organization that consistently delivers results, and recognition is one of the best tools in your

toolkit to accomplish that goal. Here are six criteria for meaningful recognition that will inspire others to succeed:

Performance-based and specific: Don't make the individual or team guess what they did to catch your attention in a positive manner. Share the specific performance or behavior that you are recognizing and give reasons why it will contribute to their success.

Timely: Immediate recognition is best, but that can be challenging when you are not at the same location or don't hear about the accomplishment for days or weeks. The key is to give the recognition as close as possible to the actual performance or behavior.

Credible: Being performance-based, specific and timely with your recognition will demonstrate your sincerity. You also enhance your credibility by sharing why the performance or behavior was important and how it helps the team achieve its goals.

Consistent: This can be a challenge. One person's exceptional performance can be another person's below-standard performance. The key is to communicate your expectations consistently so you don't create favoritism.

Individualized: While some people like to be recognized in front of a group, there are others who would be genuinely embarrassed. There are those who would value movie passes for their entire family, and others who appreciate a contribution to their favorite charity. You enhance your relationship and credibility when you balance the need to be consistent with the opportunity to individualize the recognition you provide.

Proportional: There are times when individual or team performance deserves a grand gesture, and there are situations where a simple thank you is appropriate. The most effective recognition balances the scale of your response with the magnitude of the performance or behavior.

There is nothing more important than creating an environment where people are engaged, committed and productive. So go ahead – show people the honey.

Randy Pennington is author of Results Rule! Build a Culture that Blows the Competition Away and On My Honor, I Will... He helps leaders build cultures committed to results, relationships and accountability. Send your ideas to Randy@penningtongroup.com. Follow his blog at www.penningtongroup.com.