

ARTICLE

How To Get Employee Recognition Right



An interview with TBM EVP, Dan Sullivan and MyEmployees, COO, Adam Tartt, offers advice for effectively recognizing employees, motivating people, and building a positive company culture.

DAVID DRICKHAMER

Executive Summary

Because it's de-motivating, a poorly executed employee recognition program is worse than having no recognition program at all. Adam Tartt, COO of MyEmployees, offers some advice for effectively recognizing employees, motivating people in general, and building a positive company culture.

In this article, Mr. Tartt addresses questions that many executives are asking about recognizing and rewarding top performers. He offers three tips for getting employee recognition right and addresses these topics:

- Common pitfalls of employee recognition programs
- What to consider when setting up a recognition program
- How to develop the desired culture

MyEmployees offers expertise and products that help businesses engage and recognize front-line employees. Based near Wilmington, N.C., the company's 45 employees serve 12,000 active customers, including most of the country's large retail and restaurant chains.

Because their customers tend to manage and renew their employee-of-the-month programs with the calendar year, sales of plaques and related products can jump 5X in the fourth quarter. TBM's Dan Sullivan has been working with MyEmployees to help them manage the surge by improving manufacturing flexibility. By making each workstation flexible enough to handle a variety of products, the factory is better equipped to handle both annual and monthly demand fluctuations.

Effective recognition programs keep employees motivated, reduce turnover and improve customer service, which drives repeat business. MyEmployees provides the knowledge, support and coaching for recognizing stellar performance—doing it well and making it easy—so that it continues from month to month.

In the following conversation with TBM, COO Adam Tartt offers advice for setting up and running an effective employee recognition program. He also reveals how his company nurtures an enthusiastic and highly engaged workforce. Hint: They read a lot of books.



Adam Tartt leads a team discussion at MyEmployees.

What are some of the common pitfalls with employee recognition programs?

Adam Tartt: If you don't do it correctly, it's better to not do one at all because it will demotivate people more than it motivates them. It's very easy to get it wrong.

Statistically speaking, when a new manager launches a recognition program, it will last three months. After three months it's no longer new. It's cumbersome. It's difficult to select the winner. If employees vote, it turns into a popularity contest and the true top performers aren't recognized.

Other times the manager just forgets and stops recognizing people. You've got to recognize your best people or they'll go where they will be recognized. That's the bottom line.

The plaques are just a tool to be used as part of a larger strategy. That's why we provide every client with a dedicated recognition consultant, someone on staff who is well-trained on how to engage employees, how to set up award criteria, and how to properly recognize people.

What's the first thing managers in any type of business should understand when setting up a recognition program?

Tartt: They have to start with objective metrics based on specific criteria that all employees understand. You need to recognize the people who perform well in the areas that matter most to the business. They also have to be consistent from month to month. Of course, you can do all of those things and still get it wrong.

What else do managers need to do?

Tartt: Handing an employee a plaque and saying, "Congratulations," doesn't cut it. You have to make a huge deal out of the presentation.

Gather as many employees together as you can, bring the winning employee up front, and talk about why that person won. Then you hand them the plaque and take a picture. It's about the experience of being recognized, being called out, and being appreciated in front of your peers. That's what matters.

The employees at MyEmployees are very engaged and energetic, presumably because you practice what you preach when it comes to recognition. What else do you do to develop your culture?

Tartt: Employees want to feel that their company cares about them and that they're more than just a number. So first, we genuinely do care about our employees. We genuinely want them to be better, for themselves, for tomorrow, than they are today.

We use book clubs to develop the thinking of our team members. We read and watch videos about topics around personal finance, attitude, relationships and managing anxiety. We pay our people to do that. We pay for the books. It's an hour a week. It's mandatory for everyone. Over time, people really grow from it.

It doesn't seem like that type of engagement and discussion would click with everyone.

Tartt: Well, we make it very clear when we hire people that we want employees who are lifelong learners. We don't want people who aren't going to invest in themselves. The book club is one way of helping people do that.

From an on-boarding standpoint, every new employee at our company is required to read two books: ***The 12 Essential Laws for Becoming Indispensable*** by Tony Zeiss, and ***The No Complaining Rule*** by Jon Gordon.

Complaining can ruin an organization. It can absolutely become a cancer, and it's not something that we tolerate. If there are negative people, it will infect your whole organization and people won't enjoy coming to work.

Three Tips for Getting Employee Recognition Right

1



USE OBJECTIVE METRICS

2



BE CONSISTENT FROM MONTH TO MONTH

3



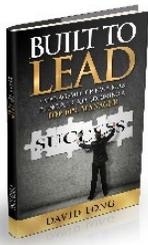
MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF THE AWARD PRESENTATION



Dan Sullivan, TBM Executive Vice President



“ There’s an amazing level of enthusiasm and energy at MyEmployees that you don’t see at many companies, large or small. It starts with hiring. They look for ‘active learners’ who will fit in with and support their highly engaged and positive culture. Of course, because they’re in the employee recognition business, they’re also great at recognizing and rewarding top performers.”



DAVID LONG
The founder and CEO of MyEmployees, published *Built to Lead*. The book highlights his leadership principles and practices and offers advice for business leaders who want to improve the performance of their companies by building a highly engaged workforce.

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