

Staff Recognition Month Tips

May 2017

FROM NELSON SCOTT

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Answering the 5Ws and H about Staff Recognition

Traditionally, journalists were expected to answer six questions in their reports—referred to as the “5Ws and H”—and preferably to do so within the first few paragraphs: Who? What? Why? When? Where? and How?

While far from complete, the tips, tools and techniques distributed during Staff Recognition Month 2017 answered these questions about staff recognition, albeit in a slightly different order:

- **Why recognize staff?** **Page 2**
- **Who to recognize?** **Page 4**
- **What behaviours to recognize?** **Page 5**
- **When to recognize?** **Page 6**
- **Where to recognize?** **Page 8**

And, of course, the biggie:

- **How to recognize staff?** **Page 9**



*“I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.”*

—The Elephant’s Child by Rudyard Kipling



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Why?

Stats to Confirm your Belief that Recognition is Important

You believe that staff recognition is important. It's in your bones. You don't need to be convinced of the value of thanking and congratulating staff for doing a good job.

But sometimes our inner skeptic demands proof. Understanding intuitively doesn't feel like enough. We ask, what does the research tell us?

Here are a few research findings to satisfy that need:

Recognition improves staff retention:

Research suggests that not feeling appreciated is a powerful force driving turnover rates up. In *How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life*, Tom Rath and Donald Clifton wrote, "The No. 1 reason most Americans leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated." In 2014, Globoforce concluded that feeling unappreciated was the No. 1 reason that employees leave jobs voluntarily. Globoforce also found that 55 per cent of employees would leave their jobs for a company that clearly recognized employees' efforts.

Recognition strengthens relationships:

More frequent recognition results in stronger relationships between managers and employees. In a Harvard Business Review

article, David Stuart wrote that when a company has strong recognition practices, 87 per cent of staff feels a strong relationship with their direct managers. This drops to 51 per cent in organizations with weak recognition practices.

When the Cicero Group asked employees which benefit would improve their relationship with their direct manager, 49 per cent said, "ongoing effort recognition," compared to 32 per cent who said, "above and beyond performance recognition" and 20 per cent for whom a five per cent salary bonus would do the trick.

Recognition increases employee

engagement: The Gallup Organization reported that in 2016, only 33 per cent of employees were fully engaged—"involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace." The majority (51 per cent) were not engaged and 16 per cent were actively disengaged.

In another study, 69 per cent of employees told Socialcast that they would work harder if they felt the efforts were better appreciated.

You may want to share these research findings with others who dismiss staff recognition as being an unnecessary waste of time that makes no difference.

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Why?

Show Staff their ROI

It's all about investments. Owners and shareholders invest money in retail businesses, industrial operations and other ventures. Governments invest in schools, health care and other services.

Staff members also invest and what they invest is more significant and more valuable than money: their time.

Like those who commit their money, staff members want to see a return on their investment. They don't want to feel that their investment was wasted. They want to feel that what they do makes a difference. They want to do work that they see as meaningful. Recognition is a way to demonstrate the ROI.

People can recover from bad financial decisions, but time lost to work without meaning is gone forever.

When recognizing staff, highlight how what they do fits into the bigger picture. Help them understand the importance of what they do by recognizing their contributions to the organization's purpose, as expressed in its mission statement, values and goals. In other words, demonstrate the value of what people do by making recognition Relevant.

Relevant is one of the five ingredients of meaningful staff recognition, the essence of which is captured in the acronym **GREAT**:

 greatstaffrecognition.com/articles/fiveingredients2.htm

Recognition is not an Entitlement

There's a difference between recognition and the other rewards people may receive from their jobs, such as a paycheck, health benefits and other perks. These are entitlements, which people receive because they have a job. If they aren't fired, or don't resign, the paycheques will continue.

Recognition is not automatic. Recognition should be precipitated by some act by the recipient. It is the response to a stimulus, such as someone doing their job well, making a specific contribution, or achieving a desirable outcome.

What are the behaviours that you value and wish to see repeated? When you observe these behaviours, respond with recognition that includes a specific description of what the recipient did.



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Who?

Recognize Each Person's Uniqueness

What special non-work talents do staff members have? Demonstrate that you value each individual staff member's uniqueness by providing opportunities for staff members to showcase what makes them unique:

- Invite the staff member with a green thumb to share gardening tips
- Arrange an art show for your resident artist, or commission a painting for your reception area
- Schedule a musically talented staff member to perform a lunch-hour concert
- Provide ingredients so a staff member can demonstrate his/her skills as a chef by preparing a special staff lunch
- Ask a staff member who is known for the quality of his photos to explain how to take better vacation photos

Recognize Staff Members Who Satisfy Customers

It's a message you have read on signs. You may even have one displayed in your office or place of business. "If you're satisfied, tell your friends. If you're not, tell us." Not only is this sentiment remarkable naive, it's like another adage that has been around for decades: "Hire slowly. Fire quickly." Neither goes far enough. Better to ask satisfied customers to tell you, as well as others. That way, you can learn what's working for them and you will be able to give credit to staff members who are doing what customers appreciate.

Related Article:

 [Advice to Hire Slow and Fire Fast is Incomplete](#)

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What?

Celebrate Day-to-Day Contributions

Often recognition programs are filled with ambiguous phrases about “going above and beyond” or “outstanding service.” While reaching these levels of performance certainly deserves to be acknowledged, it’s important not to ignore the day-to-day contributions of staff members who consistently fulfil the expectations associated with their jobs. It is this performance, along with occasional achievements that go above and beyond, that make organizations successful.

There are Always Accomplishments to Celebrate, but You May Need to Search for Them

Things don’t always go as we might wish. Sometimes, everything seems to be going wrong. It seems that there’s nothing to celebrate. At times like these, it’s important to search harder and dig deeper to find reasons to celebrate. There will always be small successes and accomplishments for which individuals and teams deserve to be recognized.

Recognize Productivity, not Busy-ness

What’s being recognized: looking busy or being productive? Sometimes it’s difficult to tell. Some people can look busy, without really achieving anything. Some managers, who fail to focus on the results that staff members achieve, praise these people because busy-ness can be easier to see than outcomes. Recognition should be acknowledging staff for doing what’s important—efforts that reflect the values of the organization and help it achieve its goals. That’s how to make recognition **Relevant**, one of the five ingredients of **GREAT** staff recognition.



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When?

Don't Delay! Recognize on the Spot

How often does this happen? You observe a staff member doing a task well and think, "That's deserving of recognition. I'll do that...later."

You genuinely mean it.

Later you will have more time to acknowledge the person's contribution. Waiting allows time to figure out the best way to say, "Well done!" You'll have time to write a thank-you note or find a small token to express your appreciation.

Then life happens. You get even busier. A crisis demands your immediate response. Your praise goes unspoken and the contribution is forgotten.

Stop waiting for the right moment. Provide immediate feedback. Let the person know you saw what he/she did and appreciate the contribution while what happened is still fresh in both of your minds.

Smile. Give the person a pat on the back or a thumbs-up. Express your appreciation in a few words.

What you say or do may not be the most appropriate way to recognize this individual, but when recognition is Timely, it is powerful.

Want to do more? You can always follow up on-the-spot recognition with some other gesture of appreciation if you wish, but when the recognition is Timely, something more is seldom needed.

More Frequent Celebrations of Service Milestones Should Focus on Contributions by Staff

According to Bersin and Associates, 87 per cent of organizations celebrate service milestones (usually at five-year intervals). That's not often enough. The average tenure with the same organization is 4.2 years (U.S. Bureau of Labor), which means most employees will never reach the first five-year service milestone. Celebrate service anniversaries annually—even more often during an employee's first year, such as after the first month, after 90 days and after six months. The focus should be on acknowledging not just that the person has been present for a specific period, but what he/she learned and accomplished during that time.

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When?

Check the Calendar for Opportunities to Recognize

While recognition should be inspired by recognition-worthy actions, occur year-round, and not be limited to special days and weeks, designated dates can still point us towards fun reasons to celebrate staff successes. During Staff Recognition Month 2017, for example, there were tips inspired by Limerick Day (May 12), Victoria Day, Sherlock Holmes Day (May 22), and Paper Plane Day (May 26).

The website www.daysoftheyear.com lists hundreds of designated month, weeks and days throughout the year, which could inspire recognition.



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Where?

Turn Waiting Time into Recognition Time

Writing a thank-you note takes only minutes (and even less time is required to write a few words of appreciation on a sticky note). Even so, it still seems difficult to find this time, unless you take advantage of the time each day when you are waiting for something else to happen: waiting for a friend to meet you in a coffee shop or restaurant; the spare moments of time when you arrive early for a meeting; or while you are sitting in a doctor or dentist's reception area. Or use the time between when you sign-in and when the moderator begins a teleconference or webinar.

Reminder: Be prepared to turn waiting time into recognition time by always having thank-you cards and sticky notes with you.

When are your waiting times? Is there enough time to write a thank-you or sticky note? What are you waiting for? Start writing!

Where to Recognize: Publicly or in Private

To praise in public and criticize in private is good advice, but better advice may be to praise both in public and privately (but never criticize publicly). Even those who thirst after public recognition are unlikely to reject private praise. Moreover, in private is the best place to recognize shy introverts who may be uncomfortable being acknowledged in front of several colleagues. It will also confuse those who know that being invited into the boss's office means the staff member is "in trouble." Turns out that this is no longer true when you start calling staff to your office to let them know how much you appreciate their good work.

Related Articles:

 [Vary how You Use Thank-you Notes to Maintain their Effectiveness](#)

 [Making Recognition Stick: How to Use Sticky Notes as a Recognition Tool](#)



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How?

Don't Hang Up on these Staff Recognition Tips

It's with you all the time already, so why not use your smart phone as a tool to recognize staff?

- Record a brief video expressing appreciation. Text or email it to the staff member.
- When you are away from the office, or if your staff works remotely, let the staff know with a short text, that you appreciate them for what they do.
- Send an e-card from your smart phone.
- Take a photo of a staff member at work and sent it to a family member. "We appreciate how hard your child/parent/spouse works. Thanks for sharing him/her with us."
- Ask a satisfied customer to allow you to record his/her comments so that you can share them with the employee who provided such great service.

How else do you/could you use your smart phone as part of your staff recognition strategy?



Related Article:

[!\[\]\(ceb7cef9f9d693d102dfe501130037c6_img.jpg\) **Looking for More Reasons to Recognize Staff? Ask Your Customers and Use Their Words**](#)

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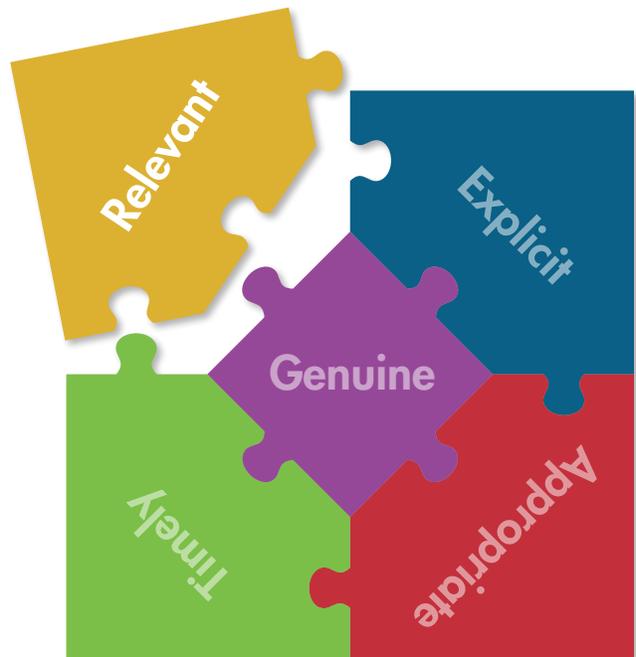
Puzzled by the Puzzle?

This graphic illustrates how the five ingredients of **GREAT** staff recognition fit together to convey a complete message of appreciation.

Examine the pieces. Notice the unique shape of the one in the middle. Unlike the others, it connects with all the pieces. This piece represents the essential ingredient of recognition that recipients feel is meaningful. Recognition must be inspired by a **Genuine** sense of appreciation. Without this ingredient, the recognition will seem insincere.

Now, consider the four corner pieces. Their identical shape makes them interchangeable. None is more important than any of the others. The puzzle would *appear* no less complete if the only pieces used were **Genuine** and four pieces representing just one other ingredient—**Relevant, Explicit, Appropriate** or **Timely**. But the message becomes stronger as each of the other ingredients is added.

How complete is your staff recognition puzzle? Do you always begin with a **Genuine** sense of appreciation? Which other pieces do you fit into your recognition? Which ingredients are added to your puzzle less frequently than others?



Related Article:

 [Five Ingredients Make Staff Recognition Meaningful](#)

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Release Your Inner Poet

May 12 was Limerick Day, which got me thinking; could we use this literary form to express appreciation? I decided I would try it:

*There once was a girl named Elaine
Who with skill could always explain
While never a bore
That less could be more
Info from which we all gain.*

Not very good, was it? I'm sure you could do much better, while I'll stick to expressing appreciation in more prosaic ways.

Words of Recognition are More Important Than "Stuff"

Much of the conversation around staff recognition is focused on tokens of appreciation—certificates, plaques, gift cards and merchandise. The right items, carefully selected with the recipients in mind, can enhance the recognition, but these are only tools.

Alone, they don't convey a message of appreciation. That depends on the person providing recognition using words that show that the gesture is inspired by a Genuine sense of appreciation. The message is even stronger when it includes an Explicit description of what was done and how it is Relevant to what the organization feels is important to its success.

Five Ingredients Make Staff Recognition Meaningful

Set a Goal to Increase Recognition and Monitor Your Progress

How many people do you recognize each day? Let's say the answer is that once a day you acknowledge someone for doing the job well or for making a specific contribution. While this may not sound like a great statistic, with a staff of 10, it would represent an average of each person being recognized twice a month. That figure is much better than what researchers have found to be the frequency of recognition that most employees experience.

Could you do more? What about twice a day? Give it a try. Set a goal to recognize two people each day and measure your success. At the beginning of day, put two tokens in one pocket. These could be anything that would easy to identify as being different* from what else might be in your pocket: game markers, oversized coins, or pebbles from your backyard (which we call "Recognition Rocks!")

Each time you recognize someone, transfer the marker to another pocket. Your goal is to have transferred both tokens from one pocket to the other by the end of the day, and double the number of people who you recognize. Over time, you may decide to increase your daily goal to three or more.

**Why a distinct shape? The tokens can serve two purposes: they are a means of keeping score and a reminder, every time you reach into your pocket, to find a reason to recognize someone.*

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Encourage Peer Recognition by Inviting Staff to Take a Colleague for Coffee... on your Dime

Here's how you can encourage staff members to acknowledge a colleague for what he/she does that makes that staff member's job easier or more enjoyable.

Provide each staff member with a gift card (with a small balance; \$10 would be lots) for a coffee shop that staff members frequent. Explain that they are to identify a co-worker who has been helpful or supportive, and to invite this person to join them for coffee as a way of expressing appreciation for what he/she does.

Who would you take for coffee? How has this co-worker made your job easier or more enjoyable?

Reminder: The third Tuesday of each month is designated as Peer Recognition Day.

Related Article:

 [What is Peer Recognition Day and Why is it Important](#)

Preparing for a Summer of Recognition

For Canadians, the Victoria Day long weekend marks the unofficial beginning of summer, which brings up the topic of summer-themed staff recognition. Here are some ways to recognize staff during (what we hope will be) the warm weather ahead:

- Deliver ice cream treats to staff at their workstations.
- Invite the team to join you in a nearby park or even in the parking lot for a lunch-hour barbeque.
- Fill a basket with everything a staff member needs for a picnic with a colleague, friend or family member.
- Arrange for a visit by a food truck and treat staff to lunch.

These ideas are just a start. How else could you take advantage of summer weather to recognize staff?

Related Article:

 [7 Vacation-Related Staff Recognition Techniques](#)

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Sweetening Staff Recognition

Visiting the candy department can suggest fun ways to convey your message of appreciation, especially to those with a sweet tooth:

- **Mars bar:** for performance that is “out of the world”
- **Life Savers:** for a person whose efforts saved the day. A real “lifesaver!”
- **Mints:** for the person who contributes so much that he/she is “worth a mint to us.”
- **Chocolate coins:** to the person who deserves to receive “bags of money”
- **Bottle of water:** for helping us “keep our heads above water” during a particularly hectic time
- **Skor bar:** “We been keeping ‘skor’ and you have helped make us winners.”
- **Coke:** for an employee who is “the real thing” (an old Coke slogan)
- **Excel gum:** because the person “Excel-ed” at a task

There are lots of other treats in candy departments that you can incorporate into your staff recognition plans. Whatever you choose to use, remember that tools alone, even sweet confections, don’t convey your message of appreciation. What will increase the impact of your recognition is the specific descriptions you use to describe what the recipient did.

Recognition that Takes Flight

Some days you want to express appreciation in ways that literally rise above all the common techniques for delivering your messages—sticky notes attached to computer screens, thank-you cards left on desks, or texts full of praise from your smart phone.

One way to do this is by using paper airplanes to deliver your messages of appreciation. Write your tribute on a sheet of paper before folding it into the shape of an airplane and launching it in the direction of the person whose performance was recognition-worthy.

Airborne staff recognition might just catch on. Soon the air could be filled with paper airplanes, delivering messages acknowledging the contributions of colleagues like a bunch of Amazon delivery drones.

How to make a paper airplane



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Sherlock Holmes Could Have Been Good at Staff Recognition



"I am lost without my Boswell."

—**Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson** in *A Scandal in Bohemia* by Arthur Conan Doyle



Today, on Sherlock Holmes Day, let's reflect on how his skills could have made fiction's greatest detective as effective at recognizing others as he was at solving mysteries.

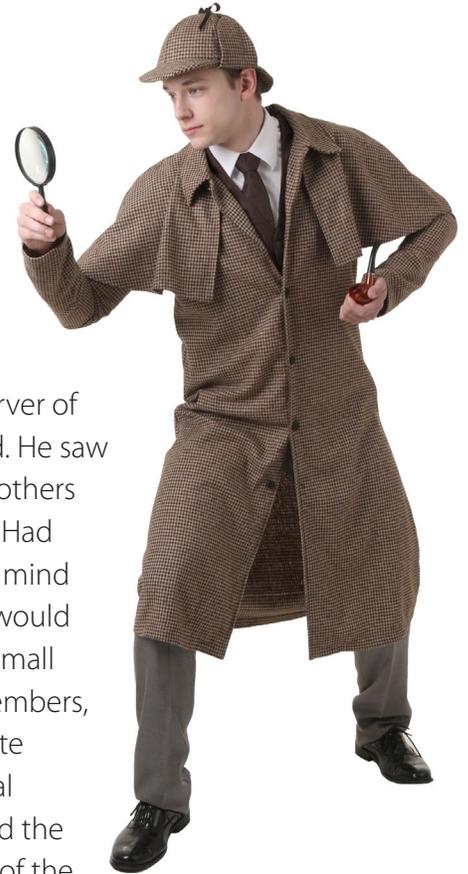
There is little evidence in Dr. Watson's chronicles of Sherlock Holmes' adventures of his praising others for their contributions. He was more inclined to criticize Watson for his shortcomings and failure to see what was so obvious to Holmes.

This is unfortunate, because the same skills that made fiction's greatest detective so effective at solving mysteries could have made him effective at finding reasons to recognize others.

It's easy to see the big achievements and contributions (going above and beyond the call of duty), but small day-to-day contributions, which build to bigger achievements, are more difficult to see.

Holmes was a proficient observer of what others did. He saw clues to which others were oblivious. Had Holmes put his mind to the task, he would have seen the small acts by staff members, which contribute to their personal productivity and the overall success of the organization.

Don your deerstalker, pick up a magnifying glass, and search for the clues that point to the small acts by staff members, which are the essential building blocks of long-term success. By channeling your inner Sherlock Holmes, you will find many reasons to recognize staff.



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Find the Best Ways to Recognize Each Individual

There is no staff recognition equivalent of a Swiss Army knife or multi-tool. There is no single way to recognize that will work for all staff members. The challenge is to discover Appropriate ways to recognize each individual. Experiment. Try different approaches to find the one that works best for each person. Chances are, there will be more than one. Even when you discover the right approach, be cautious about overusing it.

Related Article:

 [7 Questions to Ask to Recognize Staff Appropriately](#)

E-cards: An environmentally friendly alternative

E-cards are a simple-to-use, environmentally friendly alternative to traditional greeting cards. An Internet search will yield several websites offering cards for many occasions and purposes—birthdays, holidays, thank you, congratulations, and so on. There are animated cards, singing cards, cards that look like traditional cards and more.

Most sites offer both free and membership (paid) options, the latter providing access to more designs and other services, such as reminders. Some free trials are for a limited time or provide access only to part of the collection. As with traditional cards, there is the option, which you should use, to add your own message.

Here are a few sources to get you started:

- [123Greetings.com](#) – has a largest selection of e-cards, although the site can be confusing to navigate.
- [bluemountain.com](#) – one week free, after which you will need to purchase a membership
- [americangreetings.com](#) – one week free, then you need to purchase a monthly, annual, or two-year membership
- [hallmarkcards](#) – designs include familiar cartoon and movie characters. Site also includes a “handwritten” option.
- [punchbowl.com](#) – these e-cards have the look of traditional paper cards, including matching envelopes and stamps
- [jibjab.com](#) – personalized video greetings, to which you add your own image. Both free and paid memberships

Want more options?

These articles list additional sources for free ecards:

 [Free eCards: The Top Ten Sites on Line](#)

 [Free Ecards and Virtual Greeting Cards](#)

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Cookies with Smiles Convey Messages of Appreciation

When I discovered these cookies at the Second Cup coffee shop I frequent (it's where I often go to write), I knew that they could become a staff recognition tool. A challenge was issued to subscribers to Staff Recognition Month 2017. The result was some brilliant suggestions:

- For the employee who always has spring in their step.
- I would use those little cookies to share with the whole team, saying something like: "You were handpicked for our team and that makes me smile every day!"

For the tulip:

- Thank you for that great idea/tip/suggestion, etc. – as you know, it has bloomed into something wonderful.
- Thank you for supporting/mentoring/coaching a junior staff – your help has really allowed him to grow.
- Happy One-Year anniversary – it has been a pleasure to watch you bloom in this new position.



For the daisy:

- Thank you for being a ray of sunshine during a tough time!
- A little something to thank you for consistently bringing a positive outlook to our team!

Perhaps these responses will prompt you to come up with your own ways to use similar sweet treats to say thank you or congratulations to members of your staff.

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What You Can Learn from Staff Members' Previous Recognition Experiences

Here's a question to ask during one-to-one conversations with your staff members: "Describe your most memorable recognition. What makes it stand out?"

As needed, follow up with questions about how they prefer to be recognized:

- Is this the type of recognition you prefer to receive?
- What might have been a better way for your boss/colleague to have recognized you?
- Where do you prefer to be recognized? Publicly or in private?

The answers will provide insight into how you recognize staff in appropriate ways.

Retire Stale Staff Recognition Techniques

Recognition techniques have a shelf life. Keep them around too long and they may become stale. Regularly ask yourself, is there a staff recognition practice that I should retire (or at least send on a long vacation)? Not sure what to use in its place?

- Keep reading **Briefly Noted** for a few fresh ideas every couple of weeks
- Follow **@NelsonScott_ on Twitter** for new ways to recognize staff

Check out the staff recognition tips at:

 greatstaffrecognition.com

Feedback Please

Which of these staff recognition tips resonated most with you? How were you able to use it? What was the result? What staff recognition tip are you willing to share with Briefly Noted readers? Please email your feedback and staff recognition tip to nmscott@telus.net.

All the Staff Recognition Month tips from previous years:



[Click here for the 2015 Staff Recognition Month tips.](#)

[Click here for the 2016 Staff Recognition Month tips.](#)

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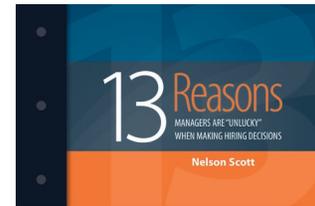
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Introducing Nelson Scott...

Since becoming a full-time consultant, speaker, trainer and facilitator in 1995, Nelson Scott has worked with managers, supervisors and administrators who are committed to hiring the right people and retaining, motivating and engaging them using high-value, low-cost staff recognition. Through his presentations and writing Nelson challenges people to build on what they already know, to make the right hiring decisions and to acknowledge employees for what they achieve and how they contribute to the organization's success.

Nelson has conducted more than 3,000 interviews, hired hundreds of people and made more hiring mistakes than he cares to admit. He has trained thousands of managers and supervisors from a variety of public, private and not-for-profit organizations on how to use interviews to gather high-quality information on which to base their hiring decisions. He also works with clients to develop interview questions, to prepare them to conduct interviews, and to manage the selection process on their behalf.

When a participant in a day-long workshop on conducting interviews asked, "How do we keep them once they're hired?" Nelson responded, "Let them know that they are appreciated. Recognize them for what they achieve and how they help your organization succeed." That brief encounter was the beginning of Nelson's decade-long journey to discover how to provide meaningful staff recognition. It has led him to develop two workshops and several shorter keynote/



breakout presentations, and to write a book, ***Thanks! GREAT Job! Improve Retention, Boost Morale and Increase Engagement with High-Value, Low-Cost Staff Recognition.*** Nelson also wrote an e-book, ***13 Reasons Managers Are "Unlucky" When Making Hiring Decisions.***

Nelson is a former president of the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a member of Recognition Professionals International (formerly the National Association for Employee Recognition.) He is also a Rotarian who has served as president of three clubs.

A partial list of Nelson's clients include more than 20 school systems in Alberta and British Columbia, the Northern Lights Health Region, the Palliser Health Region, several chambers of commerce, Sturgeon County, Suncor Energy, Syncrude Canada, Finning, Keyano College, NorQuest College, the Awards and Personalization Association (formerly the Awards and Recognition Association), the Recognition Round Table and the Employee Attraction and Retention Network (EARN).

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