

Put a Little Sunshine in Your Hospital

By: Louise S. Dunn

 Are you reading this at work? Stop - take a moment to walk around and take notice of your team. Do they look alive? Vibrant? Spunky? Or do they appear rundown, lackluster... anemic?

In the past series of articles I eluded to the garden plant theme so take a moment and think about those garden plants. What do they look like when you have those starter plants indoors and sunlight is minimal? They too appear rundown, lackluster ... yellow (anemic).

Now sit down and close your eyes and think about your plants when you place them outside, or those people you see stepping outside of an office building into the sunshine outside. What do they look like? The plants have their flowers opening and facing the sun, they get deep colored foliage and growth. The people have their faces turned toward the sun, a little kick to their step... lively. The sun is capable of delivering some positive effects to both plants and humans.

Without sunshine, plants and people take on a stunted, lackluster appearance. Give some sunshine and they become colorful and vibrant. Your team may be just like those plants in the office suffering from deficient sunshine. How can you deliver some sunshine to your team to put a little kick to their step and a vibrant smile to their face? Well, you could drag everyone outside and "plant" them in the parking lot to soak up a little sunlight - or you could deliver some psychological sunshine.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUNSHINE

What is psychological sunshine? In one word: Recognition. Two words: Recognition and Rewards. Just think about yourself. Have you ever received an award or recognition for something you did? Did someone send you a short email praising your effort, or catch you in the office to give you a high-five? How did you feel? Would you use any of these words to describe yourself: Pumped up, Enlivened, Rejuvenated, Proud or Motivated? Would you say that you felt as if you were standing outside in a warm breeze with the sun on your face (I'm merely making a connection with plants here). If the effects were so positive on you why would you keep your team in the dark? Perhaps it is time to stop denying them some positive energy and give them a little sunshine to motivate them and encourage them.

What are some "rays of sunshine" to consider for your anemic team? There are numerous books and articles talking about rewards and recognition. Some of the common ones that you hear about are: flowers, snacks, books, mugs, gift cards, merchandise and dinners. Even some cold, hard cash is an option (although there is a school of thought that merchandise is better than cash because the merchandise is similar to a trophy that can be displayed whereas cash gets lost in the efforts to pay household bills). The best reward idea is if it is personal to the person receiving it.

Another type of "ray" to consider involves a little more effort such as: handwritten cards, notes or emails (for birthdays, anniversary of start date or for appreciation of effort), peer recognition awards, assigning time to work on a pet project or recognizing community service. These rewards require some personal investment of time to put them together and time to get to know the team members.

SUNSHINE PROGRAMS

Whatever the choice of recognition or reward it must be from the leader and it must be face-to-face. Kouzes and Posner, authors of "Encouraging the Heart," outline seven steps important for an effective recognition program:

1. Set clear standards that speak of what is valued,
2. Expect the best, being aware of the Pygmalion effect (self-fulfilling prophecy),
3. Take time to walk around and look for those demonstrating the values and standards,
4. Personalize rewards to that individual recipient,
5. Tell a story about the value or exceptional standard, don't just say thanks,
6. Celebrate with the whole team, don't just hand out an award in private,
7. Set an example yourself.

Let's look at some examples and considerations for the program:

Rewards should be personal. I enjoy reading so a book on a subject I am interested in would be great. I don't do scrapbooking so a gift pass to the local craft store would not impress me too much. Gift cards to a store or restaurant are good, and you can make it even better if you send it to the family of your employee and send a personal note of praise for their family member so everyone could bask in the praise.

Tell a story to the whole team about the exceptional employee. Stories are a great way to get the message across. Why stunt the potential growth by hiding the sunlight under a basket? Get the story out there. Let's say you have an employee who devotes a lot of time to a community service organization - why not acknowledge that and recognize them for the effort during a team meeting? Some

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businesses will actually give some paid time off from work for the employee to participate in a community service project.

How many of our practices have a board where we hang thank you cards from clients? Do we ever tell stories about that situation to let everyone know how we wowed the client? Do we hang notes of praise from one member of the team to another? Recognition can be powerful. Maybe you can use your website, newsletter or facebook to praise a team member for their outstanding efforts.

You can even reward someone by giving them more work! I have a friend who enjoys working with children just as much as she enjoys working with animals. She loved being given the "job" of educational liaison to the local schools - doing career day presentations, science fairs and animal health fairs. The practice recognized her passion and paid her to take that passion to the community, a win-win for business and employee.

Giving recognition for special efforts is a simple way to give an explicit example of what is valued and explain the program with clarity. Recognition, done properly, is a powerful motivator. It can show others what is meant by going above and beyond. It can motivate others to seek out some sunshine themselves. However, as with anything good, there are some caveats.

BURN WARNINGS

We all know that too much sunshine can burn you, especially without taking the proper safety precautions. Rewards and recognition, if done the wrong way, can turn around and burn you. When rewards are expected and become an entitlement then you are experiencing the burn. If you find yourself doing constant surveillance you are experiencing a burn (it is actually stressful and inhibits creativity according to D. Blohowiak, 1992). If you are using rewards as a method of "carrot and stick" motivation tactics you are risking a burn. If you have that bulk case of coffee mugs that you hand out once a year to everyone (regardless of their performance) you are teasing sun exposure without sunscreen. Half-hearted attempts at recognition and rewards can be dangerous to the morale and engagement of your team - they will see the fakery.

Recognition must be genuine appreciation. It should recognize a job well done, an extra effort or a pride in the exemplary values a person is demonstrating by their actions. A manager should not merely walk around trying to catch someone doing something wrong. A great manager is looking for people doing something unique and extraordinary so they can praise the person, tell a story to the rest of the team so everyone can learn and grow from that success.

Sunshine does help things to grow. Rewards and recognition can help your team to grow - so why not set up a program to help them bask in the sunlight? Just think, a little bit of sunshine can go a long way - both for plants and for engaging your team.

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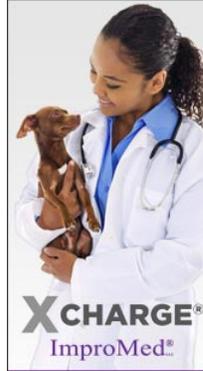
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