

Providing Effective Recognition in Your Training Programs **©copyright by Robert *(Bob) W. Lucas**

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Like rewards, recognition can help motivate learners to participate, share ideas and give input during a session. When you recognize someone, you have potentially demonstrated some degree of appreciation or approval for their behavior. The major difference between rewards and recognition is that the latter comes in a variety of intangible forms. For example, someone raises a hand to ask a question or offer a response to something you said and you call on the person. In taking this simple action, you have potentially satisfied a need the participant has for attention or to be acknowledged as significant.

The nice thing about recognition is that it can sometimes be accompanied by tangible rewards. For example, in addition to asking the group to give someone a round of applause for a creative idea, you can also reward the learner with a piece of candy or small prize.

There are many ways in which you can recognize learner performance and thus stimulate their intrinsic needs. Here are few ideas to consider.

Use the Names of Learners. An old adage says that, “there is nothing sweeter than the sound of one’s own name.” Maybe this is why successful business people use their customer’s names often during interactions. If nothing else, using a person’s name cuts down on confusion when you refer to them in a group.

Incorporate Ceremony and Ritual Into Your Programs. You can add ceremony and ritual by doing simple things. For example, whenever someone offers a solution or a perspective related to an issue or problem, have all participants join in a round of applause for the person. You can also recognize some important learner event such as an anniversary with the organization or a birthday. You might bring in a small cupcake with a candle or sparkler on it and have everyone sing. Be cautious about celebrating birthdays unless you are sure that it is acceptable. Some individuals do not celebrate such events because religious or cultural beliefs. When in doubt do not celebrate; find an alternative way to recognize the person.

Decorate the Room. Use colorful signs or posters to make learners feel that they are appreciated and anticipated. For example, put up a “Welcome” sign in New Hire Orientation programs. Personalize the sign by listing the names of new employees on it. Perhaps even take a group photo and give each new hire a copy later as a memento.

They can later review the pictures them on an anniversary date who else started working at the organization when they did.

Provide Ongoing Kudos. Throughout your session, give **kudos** for achievements by learners. These might be coupled with tangible rewards.

Give feedback. Whenever a learner does something well, or perhaps when expectations or goals are not met, let them know what you observed. If necessary, let then learner know how they might improve their performance. When giving feedback, focus on the behavior and not the individual. Give the feedback that is sincere, specific, and timely (as soon after the event as possible).

Note Exceptional Behavior. Take time to point out examples of exceptional behavior in your sessions. Compliment the participant demonstrating the behavior. Doing this can encourage that participant and others to repeat similar behavior. For example, during a break, you can use a colorful cutout shape (see Tools for Trainers in the Appendices) to write a personal compliment, then put on at the seat of the learner who exhibited the behavior. They will find it upon their return and know that what they did was noticed and appreciated. This type of recognition would be in addition to any public acknowledgement they receive from you with the group present (e.g. a sticker on their name tent).

Photo Wall of Fame. As learners enter the room, take a Polaroid or digital photograph of them. Once they develop or are printed from a computer, have each person write his or her name and a strength they have, related to the session topic, on the bottom of their picture. Post these on the wall for all to view during the breaks. This is a good way to help people put a name with a face and to learn what resources they have in the room should they need assistance later or in the future.

Get Senior Management Involvement. Request that a member of senior management come in at the beginning or end of the session. Ask the manager to stress the importance of the program and thank attendees for their involvement and investment of time.

Give “Thank You” Letters. If you cannot get a member of senior management to attend your session closing, ask that one of them (ideally the President or CEO) at least provide a letter addressed personally to each learner. Have them stress the importance of using what was learned to improve themselves and the organization and thank them for their participation. You can draft this letter for signature and increase the likelihood of getting one done and it saying what you need. At the end of the session, present the letter in an official organizational envelope, possibly along with a Certificate of Achievement or diploma or small present.

Create a Credit Chart. Prepare a flip chart with the name of each attendee on the left side of the page. Before beginning your session, have each person write down one creative idea related to accomplishment of stated learning objectives. Next, have each

person in turn offer his or her idea and write it next to their name. Post this for reference and institute any ideas that are feasible.

Start a Participant Wish List. Similar to the Credit Chart, have participants offer a list of ideas that they believe will enhance learning during the session. Flip chat their ideas and incorporate as many of the reasonable ones as possible into the session.

Schedule Training Offsite. Whenever possible, conduct your sessions away from the workplace. This prevents learners from going back to their office during breaks and returning late, but it also keeps supervisors from sending someone to get learners or ask questions. Additionally, it makes participants feel special or important to go off to a program.

Use a Traveling Trophy or Award. Create an award or buy a plastic trophy that you can use in class. Present it the first person who comes up with a solution, volunteer to assist, or whatever else you decide. Tell learners that the recipient gets to hold the award until someone else offers a creative solution or takes some other designated action. If you use these to designate group leaders, you may want to have a trophy for each group. The award provides visual confirmation of positive performance.

Arrange Site Visits. There is something about an effectively planned site visit that makes a program seem more valuable. Most learners love the opportunity to see how others are using the techniques or tools that they are being taught. They also like to see how problems, similar to their own, are being handled. Such trips can also enhance the perception of program importance and usefulness.

Establish a Special Award.. An award for some special performance can be used to enhance participant pride and spirit. The award does not even have to be serious in nature. For example, you might create a *#1 Team Player* certificate. Have learners vote for the winner at the end of the session. The certificate can be colorful with balloons or a group of cartoon characters on it along with the wording. I recently used something similar to this at a leadership retreat and the learners loved it.

Have participants Co-Facilitate. If you have someone with special talent or knowledge related to your session topic, ask them to share what they know with others. You might learn some new things also. They can share a best practice, explain a process they use, or otherwise share expertise. Recognize their efforts with group applause or ceremony and/or a reward.

Help Learners Succeed. Throughout your program, share experiences (positive and negative) along with tidbits of wisdom. Offer any information (e.g. the type of material I have offered in the Resources for Trainers section in the Appendices) that will assist participants in growing professionally. This could be done by sharing research findings, giving contact information for future networking, or offering your ideas on a particular issue.

Arrange Peers to Say “Thank You.” Build in activities during and at the end of your session where learners can give one another thanks or positive feedback. For example, you can have participants turn to one another to say “thank you” for offering information or helping make the learning experience better. You can also have everyone form groups at the end of a session, then pass out small strips of paper so that each person has one strip for every member of their group. Have each learner to write the names peers on the strips of paper so that they have one for each teammate. Finally, have members of each team write one positive thing that they liked about their team mates on the strips. Encourage them to sign the strips so that people know who the comments were from. Collect all the strips and separate them grouping the comments for each person together. You may want to do this as participants fill out their session evaluations. Without reading the strips yourself, distribute them to the correct people. Each learner now has nice comments from their peers to end their day with.

Say “Thank You.” In addition to having learners say “thank you,” take the time at the end of your session to thank participants for helping make the session a valuable learning experience and for what you learned from them. Follow this expression of gratitude with a reminder that you are available as a resource in the future, then provide your contact information if you have not done so.

Point Out Successes. Too many facilitators look for things that learners do wrong. For example, mistakes on tests are typically highlighted with red ink. Try highlighting “correct” and creative answers with a neon highlighter marker or giving positive strokes in class regularly.

Have a Dress Down Day. If your organization does not already have them, get permission for trainees to attend your session in business casual clothing. This will send a message that they are getting special treatment and help relax the environment. This latter benefit can enhance learning opportunities since psychologically; a level of stress is eliminated or reduced.

Bob Lucas B.S., M.A., M.A, CPLP is an internationally-known author and learning and performance professional. He has written and contributed to thirty-one books and compilations. He regularly conducts creative training, train-the-trainer, customer service, interpersonal communication and management and supervisory skills workshops. Bob can be reached at blucas@robertwlucas.com or through his website www.robertwlucas.com. Follow his blog at www.robertwlucas.com/wordpress and like him at www.facebook.com/robertwlucasenterprises