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Professional Leadership Results, Inc.

Helping you align your people with your vision



## Recognize—Or Else! the power of acknowledgement

**I went to management boot camp. Seriously, we all dressed alike, had to do pushups under duress, and took cold showers to wake up at reveille. Oh, alright, it wasn't really like that—it was my first time as a manager and management training just seemed like boot camp. One of the most memorable lessons I learned was in a class with an instructor who was a cross between a fire and brimstone preacher and Garrison Keillor, his voice rising and falling as he paced the front of the room. A particular story I remember him telling was about a wonderful assistant he had, who, after months of dedicated work, demonstrating above-and beyond sorts of performance and a radar-like ability to think of things before he asked her for them, suddenly quit! Our instructor was baffled, bamboozled and puzzled.**

He consulted with his peers, expressing confusion because he'd done nothing but tell everyone how fabulous his assistant was, how amazing her work, how superior her analytical skills. Finally, one wise colleague asked, "Did you tell *her*?"

Uh-oh! As a result, our instructor's best advice for new leaders was "Recognize, or else!" Too often, as leaders, we put recognition and reward for good performance on the back burner. We make the mistake of taking for granted those reliable, competent, even star performers who are here at our side, steadily getting the job done and consistently

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exceeding our expectations. We may offer a *thanks* or *good job* every so often, and I suppose that's better than nothing, but not much. We forget that offering recognition for a job well done isn't just about being nice, it's about planting seeds for continuing the good performance you desire. In the end, it makes your job easier.

### FOUR ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES WHEN PRACTICING RECOGNITION:

1. **BE SINCERE.** When we offer praise and we don't do it often, the other person may suspect a setup. Be sure the praise is something that you can sincerely, genuinely identify and whatever you do, don't tie it to a criticism or a helpful hint. Just say something positive.

2. **BE SPECIFIC.** Tell them exactly what they did well or what you appreciate. That way, they can do it again. In this way you reinforce the desired behavior and their positive performance.

3. **TELL WHY IT'S IMPORTANT.** When you offer specific praise or recognition, tell them why you liked it. Express how it helped you, your company, your organization, the team, the community or even the person himself.

4. **DO IT NOW.** Yes! Right now! Who needs some recognition? It can be an employee, a peer, even your boss! Feel free to practice on your spouse, kids or pets. Come on—even dogs appreciate praise when they hear it! (plus, sometimes you get lots of bonus tail-wagging in response) Offering specific, positive feedback is a powerful way to influence someone to recreate the behavior or performance again. Instead of saying, "Good job!" try, "You did a great job on that last report, Joe. It was clear, concise and really helped when I had to make my presentation before the board!" or instead of saying, "Thanks for your help," say, "I really appreciate your willingness to take that difficult customer call for me. I was able to finish what I was working on and during our debrief, you taught me a few new things about handling a disgruntled customer I hadn't thought about before." It only takes a small investment of time to think specifically about what you want to recognize and point out how this impacts you and your work.

You have absolutely nothing to lose by offering praise and recognition and everything to gain! Remember, recognize, or else! ❖

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