

Recognition

Month 5 Leadership Practice

Purpose

This month's leadership practice invites you to deepen how you recognize and acknowledge the contributions of others. Reflective recognition creates space for individuals to share accomplishments, challenges, growth, and contributions that may not always be visible to their leaders.

By approaching recognition with curiosity and inquiry, leaders can better understand what matters most to the people they lead and provide recognition that feels authentic, meaningful, and personally relevant.

Why This Matters

In complex clinical, educational, and research environments, important contributions often happen behind the scenes. People navigate challenges, support colleagues, learn new skills, and overcome obstacles that may not always be visible to others.

Research suggests that reflecting on progress, accomplishments, and meaningful work can strengthen motivation, reinforce a sense of purpose, and support ongoing engagement. Recognition becomes especially powerful when it highlights effort, learning, resilience, growth, and impact—not solely outcomes.

Littlefield, C. (2022, October 25). A better way to recognize your employees. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/10/a-better-way-to-recognize-your-employees>

Recognition Can Take Many Forms

Most leaders regularly express appreciation and acknowledge accomplishments. Reflective recognition adds another dimension by helping leaders understand what individuals themselves value, appreciate, or feel proud of. While traditional recognition often focuses on visible accomplishments, reflective recognition can also illuminate effort, perseverance, growth, learning, collaboration, and contributions that might otherwise go unnoticed.

This Month's Leadership Practice

Over the next several days, look for opportunities to incorporate reflective recognition into everyday leadership conversations.

1. **Invite reflection.** Ask open-ended questions that encourage individuals to share accomplishments, challenges, progress, or work they are particularly proud of.

To invite sharing:

- "What have you been working on that you're most proud of right now?"
- "What do you want to be acknowledged for that I might not see?"

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- “What’s been the hardest part of your job lately, and how have you been navigating it?”
 - “What are you working on that’s exciting you?”
2. **Explore what matters.** Use follow-up questions to better understand the effort, learning, growth, collaboration, or perseverance involved.

To explore what matters:
 - “How were you able to do what you did?”
 - “What did it take to make that happen?”
 - “What did you learn in the process?”
 3. **Reflect back what you hear.** Acknowledge and highlight themes that emerge from the conversation, focusing on contributions, growth, values, effort, or impact that the individual identifies as meaningful.

Reflection Questions

After completing this month’s leadership practice, reflect on the following:

1. What surprised you about what people wanted to be recognized for?
2. How did reflective recognition differ from the way you typically acknowledge accomplishments or contributions?
3. How did reflective recognition change the tone of the conversation?
4. What contributions did this surface that you had not previously seen?
5. How might this approach shift your team’s culture over time?