HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT—
STAFF RECOGNITION

Our work on human resources management (HRM) largely focuses on those policies and practices that provide a positive work environment and illustrate good governance in motion.

For example, in nursing we know the attributes of a positive workplace from the Magnet Recognition Program of the American Nurses Credentialing Center. This concept, from the 1990s, began by recognizing hospitals that successfully attracted and retained nurses in a time of shortage. The concept has continued to evolve but its base remains the same—creating and sustaining an environment that empowers and supports nurses to provide high-quality services to clients.

The Magnet Research continues to show its benefits, including:

- Attracting and retaining high calibre staff
- Improving patient care
- Improving both patient and staff satisfaction
- Fostering a collaborative culture or environment
- Advancing nursing standards and practice

The World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA), made up of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, and physiotherapists, also recognizes the importance of the workplace in quality outcomes and services. They identified the following checklist for a positive practice environment:

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

- Recognize the full range of competencies provided by health care professionals and provide the autonomy for these competencies to be fully utilized.
- Promote professional autonomy and control over practice and pace of work.
- Recognize and reward employee contribution/performance.
- Regularly assess employee satisfaction and act on outcomes.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Commit to equal opportunity and fair treatment.
- Provide adequate and timely compensation commensurate with education, experience, and professional responsibilities.
- Maintain effective performance management systems.
- Offer decent and flexible benefit packages.
- Involve employees in planning and decision-making affecting their practice, work environment, and patient care.
- Encourage open communication, collegiality, team work, and supportive relationships.
- Foster a culture of mutual trust, fairness, and respect.
- Adopt policies and procedures that positively encourage the reporting of professional misconduct or violation of laws/regulations.
- Provide clear and comprehensive job descriptions/specifications.
- Promote transparency in decision-making processes (where applicable).
- Ensure effective grievance/complaints procedures are in place.
- Demonstrate effective management and leadership practices.

**SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

- Invest in health and work environments.
- Foster strong employment relationships between and among employer/employee/co-workers/patient.
- Adhere to regulatory frameworks that ensure safe working conditions.
- Provide access to adequate equipment, supplies, and support staff.
- Engage employees in continuous assessment and improvement of work design and work organisation.
- Promote healthy work-life balance through policies and programs that support fair and manageable workloads and job demands/stress, and flexible work arrangements.
- Offer employment security and work predictability.
- Ensure employees practice under an overarching code of ethics.
- Communicate clearly.
- Communicate and uphold standards of practice.
- Regularly review scopes of practice and competencies.

**EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

- Support opportunities for professional training, development, and career advancement.
- Offer thorough orientation programs for new hires.
- Foster effective supervisory, mentoring, and peer coaching programs.

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- Adhere to safe staffing levels.
Adopt occupational health, safety, and wellness policies and programs that address workplace hazards, discrimination, physical and psychological violence, and issues pertaining to personal security.

Today employers in all settings talk about the importance of creating and maintaining positive workplace practices. A Google search of the phrase “positive work environment” shows 138 million results and scanning a microcosm of the literature clearly shows the importance of recognizing staff’s work—more formally known as employee recognition programs.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

Employee recognition programs—a small cost for big benefit:

- Increased productivity
- Greater employee satisfaction
- Higher loyalty
- Better employee retention
- Enhanced teamwork
- Better safety records and fewer accidents
- Less absenteeism
- Better reputation

Celebrating success is always important and need not be costly. An ice cream party after a successful project is concluded, a message from the board after a conference—all efforts are appreciated. People want to be valued and want their work to be seen as important.

There are essentially two main ways to recognize staff—through formal programs and less formally or incidentally. Good managers use both.

Providing positive feedback in an unplanned encounter with an employee or when introducing them to others—or sending a birthday card or a personal note—is often more appreciated than a formal event. The CEO who does management by walking around gets to offer a first-hand message—and it is remembered and signalled throughout the organisation!

Formal programs have been around for a long time but need to change. Research by an American firm in 2012 showed that, while modern programs were highly effective, 87% of organisations were still relying on tenure-based service level awards and that many employees were not aware of the program in their institution, while many senior managers assumed employees were regularly recognized.
The most frequently offered awards are certificates or plaques, money, gifts, or gift certificates — none of which may be what employees want. The 2012 research showed the most important aspect of a program was the ability to receive specific feedback.

An employee recognition program should reflect what the employees reasonably want and the best way to know this is to involve them in the program from the start or when revamping it. Survey employees for their opinion; use a committee to come up with recognition strategies. Put a plan in place and monitor the results regularly.

THE BOARD ROLE

Creating a supportive culture begins with the board and needs to be more than rhetoric. As the ancient adage goes, *we reap what we sow*. The board needs to set in place a policy that asserts the value of employee recognition and what the general approach will be. In the eyes of employees, it is even more important that the board demonstrate policy adherence in some way. It may be a letter on a specific occasion, a group dinner, thanking them at the end of a meeting, etc. It is important that the board “walks the talk.” This will be reflected in the way board members treat the CEO and staff who work closely with them. It is also important that the board make explicit its expectations that managers act in a supportive manner.

There are many freely available resources to assist in developing a program, some of which are listed below.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- American Nurses Credentialing Center. [Magnet Program Overview](https://www.ancc.org/). ANCC.
- Bersin & Associates. [Bersin & Associates Unlocks the Secrets of Effective Employee Recognition](https://www.bersin.com/).
- HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector. [HR Toolkit. Keeping the Right People](https://www.hr-toolkit.org/).
- Human Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories. [Employee Recognition Policy](https://www.gov.nt.ca/).
- University of Colorado. 2012. [Guide to Motivating Employees](https://www.colorado.edu/hr/resources/). University of Colorado Boulder. Department of Human Resources.