



Don't Neglect Recognition

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Sustained sales success is all in the mind...

While incentive programs can drive temporary behavior change to deliver sales increases, the best way to ensure lasting sales channel success is to build a performance culture—one that features the targeted use of recognition.

Recognition is so important to your sales culture because, while salespeople love to win, and can feel self-actualized after achievement in a sales contest, they just as importantly have a psychological need to be appreciated and praised for their efforts.

You can use that deep craving for esteem not just to celebrate your performers, but also to create healthy anxiety in the rest of your sales channel who will desperately want to be recognized next year. Recognition can also be a powerful short-term tool to grow the behaviors that are critical to long-term sales success.

The first step to maximizing the potential for recognition is to develop a true strategy for its use. Recognition strategy is a natural twin to your incentive strategy and should, in fact, leverage incentives.

A meaningful recognition strategy should:

1. Link to the overall goals of your sales organization for channel alignment.
2. Identify the list of behaviors and values that are important to your team's success.
3. Identify the traits that define your culture.
4. Include an ongoing communications plan to deliver engagement and mindshare.
5. Train managers to understand the importance of recognition and how to recognize.
6. Be channel appropriate.

As a rule of thumb, you should use 10% of the spend on your incentive programs towards a solid recognition process. That budget typically provides enough funding to support the three key components in a strong sales recognition strategy: the honor club, spot recognition and the personal touch.

The honor club is the foundation of every sales recognition strategy—the year-end celebration of the best of the best performers. Great salespeople have an innate desire to be celebrated for their perseverance. Recognition is about meeting emotional needs.

Annual recognition in this fashion is so important because it creates a subtle year-to-year pressure to succeed for all sales channel members. Once you have been in the club, you want to stay in the club. And if you're not in the club, you sure want to get into it.

Whatever you call it (president's club, winner's circle, etc.), your club needs to be something worth striving for &hellip a serious, highly publicized and public recognition of 10% to 20% of your top performers, in up to three award levels. Criteria may be as simple as exceeding sales goals, or include additional metrics.

Remember to find a custom symbol of success that is unique to your team. One example: a highly visible ring or medallion watch with add-a-diamond capability, so that repeat performance adds to the value.

Spot recognition is an underused but powerful tool for sales managers to show timely appreciation for outstanding actions, short-term triumphs and sales wins throughout the year. While the honor club functions as a long-term performance motivator, spot recognition reinforces the little victories.

The key to making spot recognition work in your culture is to make it easy for recognition to flourish. The good news is that today, a spot recognition process may be quickly put in place using a Web-based incentive or recognition system, available in different formats from a variety of performance vendors. Each of these programs offers all levels of sales management the ability to go online to send a congratulatory message, e-card or e-certificate and tangible reward (in the form of points or a gift) to a deserving salesperson.

For spot recognition to have maximum impact, it is important that the behaviors, actions or accomplishments celebrated relate back to the values and traits you have identified in your recognition strategy. By making the effort to reinforce the right kind of actions, you can build the right kind of culture.

The personal touch, in the form of a handwritten note, is a powerful (and inexpensive) method to show sincere appreciation to a salesperson and reinforce great actions. To get the most from handwritten notes, it is important to be specific about the sales action that is being praised. Even a few sentences will do.

Recognition training for your sales managers will help them understand the importance of recognition and how to recognize. The best method may be online, interactive recognition training that can be attached as a module to a spot recognition program platform. Sales managers can be guided by the site to take the training before accessing site functionality.

Channel-appropriate recognition means, logically enough, that you have a good understanding of how much control and personal interaction you have over your sales channel. Naturally, employee salespeople are the closest and best able to participate in a variety of recognition programs.

Now is the time to examine your recognition strategy and give it the same attention as your incentive gameplan. Once you have your recognition process successfully updated, you'll be at a huge advantage.

—David Chittock