



## Recognition remains important in a diverse and evolving workforce

The modern workforce is rapidly and continuously changing. As more Generation X and millennials enter the work force, employers today are challenged with acclimating to a new age of employee expectations. One fundamental fact remains unchanged, however: people desire to be recognized for their hard work and applauded for their successes. Regardless of age or career stage, above all else, employees want to feel as though they play a valuable role within their organization.

In July 2003 and November 2004, Maritz conducted an incentives poll with a varied group of 1,010 respondents. The 2004 study incorporated new dimensions relevant to current economic shifts and industry trends and clearly revealed several issues that feed employee attrition at all levels of the organization.

### What do they really want?

Today's workforce is looking to climb the professional ladder. 37 percent of poll respondents agreed that, aside from compensation, opportunity for advancement is the most important factor when selecting an employer. Regardless of career stage, employees value professional development and the chance to play an important role in their company. To realize long-term employee achievement and satisfaction, employers should clearly communicate the link between individual and organization goals and consistently define a path for career advancement.

### Culture is key.

Corporate culture and workplace environment play an integral role in employee retention and engagement. An overwhelming majority of 71 percent of respondents agreed that a company's culture is central to workplace satisfaction. Even offsite workers agreed on the importance of a positive corporate culture: 57 percent of remote employees said culture was a primary reason they joined their current company. Employee recognition programs, motivational incentive programs, and productivity-based flexible work schedules all cultivate a positive, engaged work environment that embraces achievement.

### A simple "thank you" can make all the difference.

Nearly 80 percent of those surveyed considered intangible rewards like verbal and written praise extremely or very important. As 46 percent of employees said they were receiving more recognition than criticism (up 4 percent from 2003), employers may finally be catching on to its importance – and with good reason. 81 percent of respondents who had never received a "Thank You" from a superior for a job well-done said they were very likely to leave their current job. In contrast, only 25 percent of employees who received recognition on a frequent basis said they would consider leaving. Employers can make a positive impact on employee satisfaction and retention by training managers to give frequent, timely recognition tied to a particular event or accomplishment.

### Ways to praise.

Tangible rewards like cash and intangible non-cash rewards both remain an integral part of the total rewards package. Employers used intangible rewards like verbal praise nearly four out of ten times to recognize employee performance and 80 percent of employees found such rewards extremely valuable. Although employees reported being recognized with cash less often than they preferred, there is probably a good reason – cash did not have the same impact on reducing attrition compared to other methods of recognition. Praise and feedback should be designed to motivate employees toward long term goals (i.e., career advancement, professional development) that ultimately lead to greater financial return. Using a variety of recognition tools ensures the availability of a fitting solution for every individual situation.

### Home sweet home.

As contemporary advances in technology have made it easier to work remotely, a significant and growing segment of the workforce has jumped at the chance to work remotely. However, the 10 percent of poll respondents who worked remotely identified one major disadvantage: 42 percent of them believed that onsite employees received more recognition. Only 40 percent of the offsite employees were frequently recognized for a job well done and nearly a quarter of them never heard the magic words “thank you.” Managers often simply forget to acknowledge the performance of people working from remote offices. Online recognition tools, eye-catching e-cards, and invitations to quarterly onsite meetings are all good ways to ensure remote employees feel valued for their contributions.

### Engage and retain.

Employees under age 35 are more likely than other age groups to have ‘neutral’ loyalty to their current employer. This suggests that a large number of them are “sitting on the fence,” primed to pursue other employers, especially if opportunities for career advancement or professional development become available. Documented training plans and clearly communicated promotion criteria should be an integral part of retention strategies for engaging and retaining the under 35 crowd.

Today’s workforce is like a mosaic - a blend of people at different stages in their personal and work lives, each with a different set of interests and influences. In the midst of navigating this new set of workforce challenges, employers should bear in mind the similarities that still unite their employee base. More specifically, employers should remember that most employees are still driven by the same two desires: to achieve success within their organization and to receive praise for their accomplishments.



**Stillman St. Clair**, Managing Consultant, Workforce Solutions, has over 25 years experience designing recognition and workforce incentive solutions for leading companies in all industries.



**Melissa Van Dyke**, Product Manager, Recognition Solutions, has led the successful implementation of recognition systems for leading companies using her technical knowledge and passion for solutions that engage and align people with company goals.