

The trend in workplace recognition is toward a more systematic approach that encompasses an entire enterprise and enables organizations to focus on and drive the behaviors that create success. This is a departure from the more tactical approach where individual programs are created to address unique, unrelated issues. There are three major drivers to this shift in the approach to workforce recognition:

## Evolving Business Culture

Henry Ford, when asked what colors the new Model T would be available in, famously replied, “You can have any color you like, as long as it’s black!”. His statement is a very good example of the prevailing culture during the “industrial age” of business – production of product was pre-eminent, assembly line thinking was the norm, choice was not a choice. Working for a company meant you were basically a cog in the production line. At the time, that culture was effective and worked for everyone (bigger history and sociology lesson here, but space prohibits). Not surprisingly, length of service programs were developed to highlight the behavior that was most important to maintaining business efficiency – longevity. This was the only recognition available to the vast majority of workers. People in sales roles – a small minority of the workforce - were recognized if they achieved very high levels of performance. This business culture was predominant until the 80’s.

Recent history has Baby Boomers and new-found wealth pushing business cultures up the slopes of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (<http://www.businessballs.com/maslow.htm>) to a point where “esteem and self actualization”, in most cases, are the driving needs of the majority of the US workforce. Tenure has become much less meaningful and the definition of performance has scaled far beyond the sales arena. Further, many employees today have no desire to “climb the ladder” of career success – they desire fulfilling work, but are not motivated by future promotions and gaining greater power in their place of work. Smart companies are discovering ways to meet recognition needs in a manner that accommodates the changing employment paradigm while touching their entire workforce. The result is holistic thinking about cultures and behaviors with an outcome of systematic recognition as a tool to lever change.

## Evolving Technology

In the past decade, technological advances have allowed companies to “systematize” many initiatives that were at one time either manual or non-existent because they were not possible to do without the technology available to us today. Systematic recognition is a great example. Now, it’s easy to create a recognition system that allows real time day-to-day recognition of behaviors and performance that gives all parties exposure to the information necessary to make the recognition event meaningful to the company as well as individual employees. This is especially important as recognition is most powerful when it is delivered as soon as possible after the desired behavior occurs. Additionally, companies benefit from reporting capabilities that enable insight into cultural “blind spots”, training needs and workforce engagement.

## Evolving Research

Concurrent with the changes in business culture and technology, the body of research related to employee engagement and productivity has continually generated the same results – systematic recognition in the workplace has a high degree of efficacy. Key findings include:

- Employees that feel valued and trusted are more productive.
- Employees that understand their company's reason for existing are more engaged.
- High performing employees will leave places that do not value their contributions.

The best places to view a cross section of this research are at Recognition Professionals International ([www.recognition.org](http://www.recognition.org)) and the Incentive Marketing Association ([www.incentivemarketing.org](http://www.incentivemarketing.org)).

## Conclusion

Systematic recognition is a high value tool that can communicate and reward right behaviors in the workplace. It is culturally relevant, technologically feasible and a proven investment in organizational growth.

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