How to recognize remote employees in a way that doesn’t feel artificial

Yes, we know employee recognition is important. But how to recognize remote employees in a way that feels authentic? Here are 6 recommendations.

While we’re all chatting through screens, typing on our keyboard, and shooting off emojis, you may be wondering how to recognize remote employees in a way that doesn’t feel as sterile or contrived as the mediums we use to communicate remotely.

Do you send your team member a gift card when they succeed at a big project? Do you Slack them a “thank you” via DM? What truly translates as gratitude when trying to recognize a remote employee?

As a remote manager, you likely know of the benefits of employee recognition. According to a 2015 SHRM/Globoforce Survey with 6,000 people, 86% of people believe employee recognition increases employee happiness.

Though, I likely didn’t need to even cite that statistic for you know that receiving positive feedback feels good, for ourselves included 😊

The tricky part of how to recognize remote employees well is to do it in a way that does, in fact, increase this happiness – and doesn’t feel cheesy and transactional. Especially if giving positive employee recognition isn’t something that comes naturally to you.

To do this, here are 6 important considerations for how to recognize remote employees in a way that doesn’t feel artificial:

#1: Words, words, words.

In a 2018 Deloitte survey with 16,000 people, 54% of employees said that they preferred a verbal thank-you and 31% preferred a written thank-you when being recognized for day-to-day accomplishments. Compare that to only 14% of employees saying a gift or celebration of some kind was their preferred form of employee recognition. Clearly, employees aren’t looking for a bunch of fanfare. Direct, genuine words go a long way. And, especially, when you’re remote, it can mean more than trying to mail a gift to someone.
#2: It’s not just what you say, but how you say it.

Our recognition falls short, however, when we fail to be specific about who and what we’re recognizing. It’s easy to fall prey to this. Ever said, “Good job, team” without specifying names of team members or the task itself? While well-intentioned, you missed a prime opportunity to have your employee recognition feel more sincere. Next time, be sure to get specific about the event, the project, the situation— and about people’s names— that you want to highlight.

#3: Spot the Van Gogh.

Vincent Van Gogh might be the most celebrated painter of today—yet whose work was egregiously overlooked by his contemporaries. **Don’t miss the Van Gogh in your own team.** In Know Your Team, one of our Culture Questions we ask is, “Have you seen someone here do great work that’s gone unnoticed?” Out of 1,148 responses across 209 companies who asked this question, 76% of people said, “Yes, I’ve seen someone do great work here that’s gone unnoticed.” Start looking closer at your own team: What great work is happening right under your nose that you haven’t quite noticed yet?

#4: Progress, not just accomplishments.

The highlight reel is a natural thing to laud. When someone reaches a milestone, closes a deal, ships a new feature, launches a new product— we celebrate and we recognize. But **what about the progress made, even when the final destination hasn’t been reached yet?** Recognizing the journey matters too. An essential part of how to recognize remote employees well includes drawing attention to the obstacles someone has surmounted, and how far someone has come. Recognition of progress is as meaningful as the recognition of accomplishments.

#5: Their words, not yours.

One of the most effective ways to recognize your team is to share the words of others—not just yours. For example, **is there a glowing customer review that would be encouraging to the team?** Or how about the complement one of your partners gave you about how easy it was to work with one of your team members? Share the words of others, and not just your own.

#6: Lean into your own recency bias.

(PS: Our Shout-outs Tool in Know Your Team is perfect for writing words of positive recognition for your remote team members.)
We remember something the more recent it happened to us. As a result, when you notice something exceptional in your team that should be recognized, **it’s best to recognize it as soon as you can** – versus waiting before you (or the other person!) forgets about it. Using a tool like **Shout-outs in Know Your Team** can help with this, as we periodically nudge you to share recent positive recognition, so you never go too long without giving positive recognition.

Yes, these 6 best practices require a bit more energy and time on your end than issuing a gift card to someone on their work anniversary or giving a quick thumbs-up emoji in a Slack channel. But in a way, that’s what makes this form of employee recognition meaningful. You’ve taken the time to be specific, write a thoughtful statement or two. That conscientious and care translates, even while working remotely.

Try to carve out even 10 minutes to consider these six tips for how to recognize remote employees next week. You might be surprised by the difference it makes.

* **Wanting to enact all of these 6 best practices? Look no further than our Shout-outs in Know Your Team.** If you haven’t checked it out yet, you might not want to wait to give it a whirl. **Give Shout-outs a try completely for free today.**

Never miss a post – get our latest leadership insights, as they’re released.

You might also enjoy reading...

---

Written by Claire Lew

CEO of Know Your Team. My mission in life is to help people become happier at work. Say hi to me on Twitter at @clairejllew.