[Reinventing Employee Service Awards – Ask HR Bartender]



Does your organization have a service award program? You know, one of those programs that acknowledges how long an employee has been with the company. I think a lot of companies do. But how often do you take a good look at the effectiveness of the program? Today's reader question is focused on just that.

> My company is re-evaluating what we're giving employees who have reached an employment milestone. Currently, we have three points in which we give milestones: 5, 10, and 20 year marks.
>
> We are considering a change to recognize 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20 year marks. We have to be mindful because we have offices globally, and whatever we decide must be easy for the other offices to execute as well.
>
> Do you have any ideas of what companies are doing for these milestones? How do we determine what is the right fit for us? How do we gauge what our employees want?

I can completely understand the need to reinvent service awards. Like the suggestion box program, service award programs can quickly become stale. Companies are sometimes reluctant to change the program because they immediately associate the service award with tradition. However, we have to remember that service awards are about *recognition* and should be updated to reflect the culture of the company.

To help respond to this reader question, I asked my friends at Globoforce, the leading provider of social recognition solutions, to share their expertise. Based upon their research, Globoforce added a couple of the challenges they've seen with "old school" service awards:

- It misses a key ingredient – people! There is no way to involve one's colleagues to share stories about the great times people had together and the tremendous impact the employee has made both as a friend and employee.
- The focus is on the prize. The reward selection is often centered around an emotionless pin or plaque, or a choice from a preselected set of items from a catalog.

According to them, here are some basic questions for companies to consider when implementing or revamping the company's service award program:

- At what milestone years do you want to recognize employees' service (i.e. 5-10-15 or more frequent, 3-5-7-10, etc.)?
- What award levels (from a points/dollar standpoint) will be attached to each milestone?
- If you have an existing recognition program, how can you integrate the new program into the existing program?
- Does it include mobile, social, and video capabilities, allowing everyone in the company to participate in the experience?

Service awards should be personal, timely, and use accessible communication tools like mobile, social and video. We tell managers all the time that "atta boys" and "good job" are not sufficient forms of recognition. If that's true, then neither should "happy anniversary". To be effective, it has to be more than that.

Smart organizations realize the key to engagement is retention. One of the ways to retain employees is to recognize them and appreciate what they've contributed to the business. But there are no more sacred cows. Recognition must be timely and specific. Most of all, it must be easy to deliver.