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FOSTERING POSITIVITY



By Sally Mitchell-Wolf & Krysta Fox

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changeosity
Creating Better Leaders. Creating Better Organisations

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Sometimes, the things which stick, or have most meaning and impact for us, come from unexpected places. We seem to just stumble upon them.

A recent podcast ([Episode 10](#)), where the conversation began with Krysta sharing her impressions of Dan Cables' book "Alive at Work", and a few incidental conversations around the office fed into the idea for this month's Insights edition about 'fast and effective' techniques for cultivating workplace positivity.

IS THE IMPACT OF COMMON RECOGNITION PRACTICES WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO BE?

No doubt many readers have experienced the traditional once-a-year staff dinner or similar event. Often these feature awards recognising individuals for years of service or targets reached being bestowed. Familiar too would be the 'high' of a team building activity in an annual PD quickly dissipating once the day-to-day resumes.

Pop culture is full of clues that big promotions, impressive portraits adorning

hallways, and privileges such as one's name on a desk or door plaques, a personal parking space or keys to an executive bathroom are prizes to be coveted!

However, despite the truth that a raise or bonus is always welcome, we also know that recognition and workplace positivity isn't 'just about the money'. If you're with us in thinking the traditional trappings of the corporate world's tools for recognition might be a little outmoded and don't really cut it to create a positive workplace culture – read on!

CAPTURING WHAT IS MISSED

For every promotion, and other more traditional and essentially competitive way to recognise and reward, the majority miss out. Worst case, the workplace becomes an isolating, competitive environment where collaboration is replaced with cliques. Too many readers would have their own story of credit *not* being where it's due and experienced someone 'getting ahead' on what has been the unacknowledged work of others.

The (sometimes tired looking) employee of the month displays, seen at your local fast-food outlet, may be tried and true staples of 'Management 101' and have a place in your leadership approach. But far more



"We are all human, and none of us can handle the super high levels of stress and energy needed in our jobs, 24/7. I find a simple 'Thank-you' or, 'How are you? Can I get you anything?' boosts energy and positivity during long or particularly busy functions. If a staff member is dealing with a difficult situation or guest I will check they're alright, and create a space that allows them to step away momentarily to gather themselves, if needed."

Ibrahim Andraos – Meetings and Events
Assistant Manager Sofitel London St James

desirable are things that let individuals know why they are valued because that encourages a helpful and collaborative mindset.

If you are familiar with the Changeosity way, you know we believe diverse workplaces can connect and perform through values-based thinking that crosses generational and other cultural gaps. We also believe that the simplest things can be the most powerful.

EXISTING OBSERVANCES CAN CONNECT WITH YOUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

Choosing days from the 'observances' such as those listed by organisations such as the [UN](#) that align with your organisation's values can be a starting point. Inviting staff to wear a specified colour on a designated day can be a low-key, low-cost positive culture builder.

A range of less formal, more fun focussed days can be found listed on various websites. Some examples (which have no affiliation to Changeosity) are included at the end of the article.

Oh, 'heads up' – the first Friday of October is World Smiles Day!

USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO BUILD ENGAGEMENT

You might consider selecting a short list and using a digital tool to have the team choose which two or three will be featured in the coming quarter. Use something like SurveyMonkey or the poll function within your in-house collaboration software.

If everyone in the organisation doesn't have access to such chats (think: admin

assistants, housekeeping, security, and other support staff) don't overlook other methods such as the traditional box for people to drop a 'voting slip' into, or simply talking to people to gather input.

By inviting everyone to vote it will help build both anticipation and ownership. You will also gain a sense of what might most encourage participation and contribute to success.

MIX IT UP!

Should your voting process end up including a 'day of' which lends itself to the visual, perhaps International Animation Day on October 28th, a dedicated thread where people take a moment to share a favourite animated character or show has the potential for prompting a little light-hearted sharing, connection, and nostalgia.

This could be adapted to share favourite travel destinations on World Tourism Day, on September 27, for example.

Whatever the theme and tone of the observances which are right for your organisation, using existing resources and channels is a way to create high impact at low cost.

Just remember to aim for small and regular events which mix physical participation with opportunities for hybrid and digital ways for people across the organisation to participate.

DRAW ON EVENTS IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

At a corporate level, joining in on local events, including coming together around a specific charitable cause or a culturally



significant time can contribute to workplace positivity and a sense of shared meaning.

The regional city council where the writer lived for some years had established a tradition of “Tropical Thursday”, subsequently adopted by many businesses in the area. On a given day each month it was commonplace across the town to interact with people in a range of professions sporting a ‘Hawaiian shirt’ in place of the usual work or business attire.

Being in an organisation which participated amplified camaraderie and a sense of belonging.

We would be remiss, at this point, to not mention the many events and initiatives which are supported by Dubai Government.

These range from those which embrace volunteering and [charitable causes](#) such as [Dubai Cares](#) to events which promote health and [fitness](#). If you are not in Dubai, no doubt there will be equivalents in your community.

IN-HOUSE TEAMS AND PROJECTS

In-house, reminders to get up and stretch regularly, or pause to take ten mindful breaths several times during the day can shift the tone of the workspace. As well as mindfulness techniques, within the context of establishing a particular project or team, or reviving one, the Changeosity team use Padlet to create a positive spirit.

No doubt some readers will recall the process which begins with choosing a fun avatar to represent each member followed

by others posting on the strengths and qualities for which the individual is recognised and appreciated.

The positive feedback boosts the team while also serving as a reminder of the value of having a team with different strengths and viewpoints brings.

Implementing a gratitude ‘check-in’ at the start of a regularly scheduled meeting is another technique which can build the habit of positive acknowledgment.

When discussing this article, one technique which struck a chord was an experience in an organisation where a dedicated chat thread shared a weekly announcement of the recipient of a coffee ‘shouted’ at the local café. The announcement was phrased as an acknowledgement of a specific and usually, small thing the recipient had done, nominated by the previous recipient.

This simple, low-cost celebration reflected and fed into an embedded culture of gratitude. Of course, it wasn’t really about the coffee, the value of the recognition and habit of ‘paying-it-forward’ was far greater.

CREATING POSITIVITY AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Leaders who are aware of individual recognition preferences can motivate and contribute to building a culture of positivity in a really meaningful way.

One of those stumbled upon and very valuable tools which Changeosity uses is a recognition checklist. Completed when onboarding staff or as part of a transformation process, it identifies if tangible or intangible recognition, given publicly or privately, is preferred by individuals. Knowing that public recognition or a standard format may not be valued by some, the checklist clarifies things such as a formal certificate or informal thank-you note has greater meaning.



Other recognition possibilities on the checklist include opportunities to join special project teams, being provided with a forum for sharing knowledge in area of strength, receiving gift vouchers, or earning time-in-lieu. A Recognition Box is another technique we've seen used to prompt key leaders in an organisation to take time to notice and celebrate positives. Such a box may contain gift vouchers, appreciation cards or mini chocolates (or equivalent) and even branded company items to be distributed within a given time frame. Facilitating acknowledgments by leaders models and helps establish a culture of gratitude in the workplace.

Whatever the form, sharing genuine appreciation contributes to the wellbeing, resilience and stress reduction experienced by both leaders and employees.

EMBRACE THE INCONVENIENT

In a busy workplace our default may be to the seductive convenience of a brief email or even a default template for quickly checking 'recognition' off on the to-do list.

We would urge you to consider the unspoken value of the inconvenient. The

thought behind the efficiently delivered recognition may count for something but the effort involved in a handwritten note or getting up from behind the computer on your desk, walking and speaking to an individual, the essential humanness involved in such inconvenience, has far greater meaning.

Further, being specific about what is appreciated and a brief indication of the impact it had on you, or others is far more powerful than a generic 'thanks for your effort'.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

'The boss' unexpectedly shouting donuts or lunch is eternally popular. Such a gesture can have even greater impact if the leader is there to share it. If spontaneous rather than routine, and timed for when projects and deadlines are intense, the impact can be again amplified.

Establishing a mindful lunch break, and that lunch isn't eaten while continuing to work at a desk can help. Don't forget to consider the potential for sharing and connection that can arise through facilitating a '[pot-luck](#)' breakfast or lunch in the office.

Food is deeply entwined in culture, identity and shared meaning. Plus, occasionally it's fun to eat ice cream as part of your breakfast because that's what one member of the team thoughtfully contributed! 😊

MOBILISE THE CHEERLEADERS

Not all techniques for cultivating positivity need be top down. Indeed, a true culture of positivity will be found in an organisation with peer-to-peer recognition embedded.



"It's important to dig and find the engine room, where the consistent quality work is done and reassure those individuals that, whilst it might not be high profile, their work doesn't go unseen and is appreciated.

It's also remarkable how much public acknowledgement tends to be dissected and interpreted and, worst of all, compared. A personal chat allows you to thank the person and explain the impact of the good work. I think it is so much more powerful."

Richard Bishop – Assistant Head Teacher
Sunmarke School

The approach of World Kindness Day (November 13) could be the impetus for establishing a cross department team of 'cheerleaders' who anonymously and discretely leave an unexpected positive or encouraging 'post-it' on colleague's desks.

Similarly, recognising the talents of a few key individuals and encouraging a movement of random acts of kindness can get the habit of peer-to-peer gratitude and helpfulness rolling.

KEEP IT MEANINGFUL – AND DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL!

Now, just to be very clear, we are not endorsing an 'everyone gets a prize' approach which has been implemented in some parts of society.

Additionally, we encourage you to be wary of generational and other stereotypes such as those underpinning the dearth of articles offering advice on how to manage and lead 'millennials' compared to 'Boomers' and 'Gen X'.

The previously mentioned recognition checklist or connecting through values can help here.

Few of the ideas and suggestions here are revolutionary and most have been

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

If you are looking to generate the kind of culture that empowers and inspires your team, then the team at Changeosity can help you. Please contact us!

REFERENCES

Calendar of United Nations observances: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/list-days-weeks>

List of Global observances for 2022: <https://observances.global/2022-dates/>

"Awareness" days listed by month: <https://www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/>

'Day of..' listed by month: <https://www.daysoftheyear.com/coming-up/>

"Random and Weird" Days: <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/fun/>

Dubai Government information about charitable activities: <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/charity-and-humanitarian-work/ways-of-doing-charity-in-the-uae>

Dubai Cares: <https://www.dubaicarees.ae/>

Dubai Fitness Challenge: <https://www.dubaifitnesschallenge.com/>

contributed by individuals rather than research and reference to 'experts'.

The image on the first page of this article features the team at Link Media. In that organisation, when it's your birthday you get to spin the big wheel with your chances of a prize being 7 to 1. What a fun way to celebrate with your team members!

This serves to highlight that there is a wealth of great ideas already out there, you don't need to invent something new to work on creating a meaningful culture of positivity. Rather, the key is to thoughtfully select simple ideas which are a good organisational fit and implement them progressively.

It's our sincere hope that in reading this article you have stumbled upon some inspiration you will turn to action.

If you have ideas to share please do add them to our recent [Linkedin post](#) where we asked the question:

What is your favourite fast and effective technique for cultivating workplace positivity?

Summary of Article Ideas

Observance Days

Avatar poster on padlet.com

Join local events

Support a charity

Hawaiian shirt day

Mindful breath exercises

Gratitude check-in

Pay-it-forward coffee

Recognition checklist

Recognition voucher box

Random donuts

Potluck breakfast

Colleagues thank you post-its

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