# 9

# STAFF MOTIVATION AND RECOGNITION

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The job of supervising direct support professionals (DSPs) can be difficult, challenging, and at times frustrating. It is, however, also rewarding, stimulating, and important. This chapter focuses on how to keep staff. Motivating staff and providing recognition can often make the difference in whether staff members remain with the organization. It is essential for front-line supervisors (FLSs) and managers to acknowledge employees' accomplishments and positive work performance. An employer that develops satisfying jobs that allow staff members to meaningfully contribute will produce employees who are highly motivated (O'Nell, Hewitt, Sauer, & Larson, 2001).

## TARGETED FRONT-LINE SUPERVISOR COMPETENCIES

Competent FLSs understand the importance of employee recognition and can match specific recognition techniques to the unique needs of individual DSPs. Supervisors also effectively communicate with staff by listening to their concerns, supporting and encouraging their ideas and work, thanking them for their contributions, and providing positive feedback regarding performance. Specific recognition and motivation skills needed are listed here.

### Primary Skills

**1**

FLSs recognize the need for and plan celebrations with staff.

FLSs treat DSPs as professionals and acknowledge DSPs' unique skills and contributions.

FLSs effectively use organizationwide recognition plans and personal ways of acknowledging others for work well done.

### Related Skills

**5**

FLSs know how to develop and implement a plan for reducing unwanted turnover and vacancies at their own site or across the organization as a whole.

FLSs support other FLSs in understanding and learning about recruitment and retention strategies and why they are important.

FLSs monitor turnover, recruitment success, and employee satisfaction and use the results to improve personnel practices.

**3**   FLSs identify necessary resources for individuals supported and DSPs and advocate for these resources with their managers.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

### Defining Employee Motivation

Experts have not yet agreed on a single definition of motivation (Reid & Parsons, 1995). Perhaps this is because every person is motivated differently. For this chapter, motivation is defined as a willingness of an individual to put forth high levels of effort toward organization goals while simultaneously satisfying his or her needs (E. Lightfoot, personal communication, 2002). Motivation is related to both performance and enjoyment of one's work life (Reid & Parsons, 1995).

Different things motivate different people. Some people are motivated by praise. Others are motivated by knowing they did a good job. Still others are highly motivated by being able to cross off all of the items on their to-do list at the end of each week. Motivation can be an internal process, or it may come from external sources. Motivation can come in the form of concrete and measurable interventions, or it can be intangible. Motivation can be either formal or informal. Effectively motivating staff requires taking the time to get to know what motivates each individual staff member.

### Importance of Motivating Staff

Why bother motivating staff? Figuring out what each person prefers as a motivating strategy and integrating it into daily work culture are essential. Motivation is a cornerstone in each employee's success within an organization. If an employee is not motivated to do a good job or to deliver high-quality services to supported individuals, everyone suffers, including the employee.

Having employees who are excited to come to work every day and who anticipate their duties breeds a positive work environment. An employee who meets the workday with enthusiasm and vigor can also meet the needs of a supported individual who has challenging behaviors or can face the occasional disappointment of unmet goals. A highly motivated employee performs his or her job duties in a manner that promotes the mission of the organization. People who receive support services will get the best support from motivated staff. A highly motivated staff can influence numerous stakeholders to effect change and to create an overall positive environment. When one organization builds a highly motivated staff, other organizations want to know its secret.

Employees who lack motivation and dread coming to work are less likely to come to work every day. The organization may begin to experience problems such as poor work attendance and poor quality of work performance, and eventually the organization will see an increase in its turnover rates. Motivated employees, on the other hand, come to work routinely and on time, meet and exceed performance goals, and remain with the organization despite challenges.

To fully understand how to use motivation strategies, it is helpful to first understand why many employees feel demoralized and work without a sense of motivation. Reid and Parsons (1995) argued that in human services, staff performance objectives

are difficult to measure. It is difficult for staff to ever *really* know how well they are performing their jobs because they rarely have direct contact with and observation from their supervisors. The missions of many organizations cannot easily be measured in a performance-based manner, which means that there is further ambiguity in the message to staff about their performance (Reid & Parsons, 1995). This is because mission statements often focus on quality of life for people who receive supports, and just as people are individually motivated, quality of life is individually measured. Thus, it is often difficult to quantify and codify whether the mission of increasing quality of life is being met. In addition, several external factors contribute to demoralization, low morale, and the need for motivation. Such external factors include legislative shortcomings regarding funding for wages or new services, poor depiction by media sources of who DSPs are and what they do, low pay standards across the field, lack of professional identity for DSPs, and lack of community resources for support.

## RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS

Since motivation is not easily defined in human services settings, there is no single recipe for supervisors and managers to use for motivating employees. It is not possible to provide a sure-fire method of motivating each staff member (O'Nell, Hewitt, et al., 2001; Reid & Parsons, 1995). Organizations, however, can use several general theories and specific strategies to motivate employees.

### Internal Motivation

Internal motivation is described by three complementary theories that are based on job satisfaction elements: hygiene, needs fulfillment, and expectancy. Hygiene and needs fulfillment theories are based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how they influence job satisfaction. Hygiene is based on the lowest two levels of Maslow's hierarchy: physiological needs and safety needs (Russell, 1999). Maslow's theory identifies human needs and presents them in order of their importance for humans. Two of the most basic needs according to Maslow's theory are physiological and safety needs; these represent the most fundamental of all human needs. At the top of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization, which all humans desire but do not necessarily need in order to survive. In the work environment, the basic elements that employees need in order to survive relate to aspects of the job such as supervision, policy and administration, working conditions, interpersonal relationships, status, job security, and salary (Russell, 1999). Thus, hygiene theory suggests that good supervision, working conditions, and positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors influence motivation. Also, sound policies, decent pay, and a sense of security can be motivational influences for employees. Certainly the literature within the human services field suggests these factors do matter. Common reasons DSPs give for wanting to leave their positions are difficulty with co-workers, poor supervision, and low wages and few benefits (Larson, Lakin, & Bruininks, 1998).

Needs fulfillment theory suggests that work satisfaction is also associated with the highest three levels of Maslow's hierarchy: belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. An employee's satisfaction and ultimately motivation depends on recog-

nition, task completion, level of responsibility, advancement, and growth potential (Russell, 1999). According to needs fulfillment theory, people will be internally motivated if they are recognized for their accomplishments and have opportunities for growth and advancement. It can be challenging for community human services organizations to provide internally motivating factors. DSPs often are not recognized for the varied responsibilities and roles they play within an organization, and there are few career ladder opportunities for DSPs who want to advance but who also want be in direct support roles (Jaskulski & Ebenstein, 1996).

Last, expectancy theory relates to an individual's expectation that an act will result in an attractive outcome or reward (Kanfer, 1990; Russell, 1999). The theory is focused on the following three relationships: effort–performance, performance–reward, and reward–personal satisfaction (E. Lightfoot, personal communication, 2002). The premise behind this theory as it applies to an employment setting is that a person's effort directly affects that person's work performance. The quality of that work performance then influences the rewards that the person may or may not receive. And finally, the reward gained or lost by an individual clearly affects his or her personal satisfaction with his or her job. Within community human services, DSPs rarely receive bonuses, and the outcomes of their work are often vague and unclear. The more supervisors can clearly articulate desired outcomes, perhaps the more motivated employees will be. Also, moving toward systems in which staff members are recognized for their outcomes based on expectations theory may influence staff behavior. Clearly, in expectancy theory, there must be a link between effort, reward, and personal satisfaction.

## External Motivation

External motivation theory suggests that the key to an employee's satisfaction is controlled outside of the individual. Three external motivation theories include reinforcement, goal setting, and equity. The most general of these is reinforcement theory, made popular in the 1930s by B.F. Skinner. Skinner set forth that an individual's behavior (here, work performance) is determined by stimuli outside of the person (Russell, 1999). The integral aspect of a reinforcement approach to motivating staff is rewarding the person for desirable performance and punishing him or her for undesirable performance (Luthans & Kreitner, 1985). For example, employees who show up to work every day on time and as scheduled are given the chance to be randomly selected to get dinner for two at a local restaurant. However, if they are late, they may be disciplined, and if they do not show up, they may be fired.

Goal-setting theory is based on the use of written performance goals to motivate the employee (Locke & Latham, 1990). Employees may be increasingly motivated if they participate in the goal setting and receive supervisory feedback during their process of achieving the goal (Russell, 1999). Theorists believe that specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). A general goal, such as one that asks an employee to "do your best," typically results in smaller increases in performance levels. One caveat in applying goal-setting theory to supervisory practices is that setting goals too early in the learning process can draw attention away from learning, causing learning to be hindered. Thus, motivational manipulation through goal setting may be more effective after basic tasks have been mastered (Kan-

fer & Ackerman, 1989). This is especially true for employees with fewer overall skills and abilities. It may be advisable to have employees participate in setting their own performance goals and be individually measured against these goals instead of using standard performance rewards in which all staff work toward the same goals and are measured in the same way.

Equity theory is based on the idea of fairness. In many organizations, the issue of fairness is an important focus. Often employee morale suffers and turnover rates are affected when employees do not perceive that their supervisor is fair. For example, if one staff member feels as though another is treated better or is given additional rewards that are not given to all employees, he or she may feel frustration, anger, or burnout, all of which can lead to the employee quitting the job. Equity theorists put forth that employees will form their opinion about their treatment by an employer based on how other employees are treated by the employer (Russell, 1999). To determine fairness of financial benefits, an employee will compare his or her pay with that of an employee of a similar skill level and position. Based on his or her findings, the employee may or may not be motivated to continue to perform at a high level. The concept of equity and fairness comes into play with DSPs routinely. Because most organizations only have one level of direct support positions, DSPs often compare themselves with one another. When rewards and reprimands for performance are not given fairly and equitably or are not used at all, DSPs are more likely to compare among themselves their levels of pay, scheduled hours, and access to benefits. This can lead to unhappiness and feelings of unfairness and inequitable treatment. Organizations that have fair and equitable practices will likely have fewer DSPs who become disgruntled enough to leave their positions.

## Summary of Motivation Theories

Internal and external motivational theories relate to all employees. One employee may be very invested in equitable treatment, whereas another employee may care more about his or her level of responsibility. The key point is that each employee is different and will desire different forms of motivation. The remainder of this chapter explores three areas in which FLSs and managers can make a significant impact in the motivation of their employees: training and staff development, performance goals, and employee recognition.

## STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

## Use Training and Staff Development

Supervisors and managers can use training and staff development practices that influence both motivation and recognition. Training and staff development can support the level of confidence a DSP feels related to his or her job duties. If an employee is unsure about how to do his or her job, his or her motivation is likely to suffer. For the purposes of employee motivation, employee orientation and initial skill development must be supplemented by ongoing training for long-term professional development. Providing opportunities for DSPs to gain advanced knowledge and skills of their in-

terest and those related to recommended practice within the industry can be a motivating influence on the employee.

Many employees will seek opportunities for continuing education and advanced training; however, other employees may need to be encouraged and supported in this pursuit. Supervisors and managers must be prepared to assist employees by having up-to-date knowledge of the available training and educational opportunities. The professional development of employees may take place through professional conferences, training workshops, or professional networking. These opportunities should supplement the mandatory annual training requirements imposed by regulations or organization policy, which often are not adequate to train DSPs to do what is expected of them on the job.

Staff development opportunities should be treated as rewards and growth experiences and should not be required. Organizations can be creative in designing development opportunities. For example, if an employee has always wanted to enhance his or her cooking skills and a person who receives supports loves gourmet food, the organization can find an opportunity to send the employee (maybe along with the person who receives support) to a culinary institute or a gourmet cooking class offered by a local restaurant. Or, if an organization has just started supporting a person who has fragile X syndrome, an employee could attend a national fragile X conference to become the organization's expert on the topic. Organizations can challenge employees to use the Internet to find and report new and exciting information relevant to direct support or the individuals supported.

Whether an organization financially supports the professional development of employees, supervisors can do so by seeking inexpensive and creative options (e.g., providing information from the Internet, sharing books and other resources, hosting information-sharing sessions at staff meetings), recognizing people who have acquired learning, providing opportunities for employees to share new learning with others, and acknowledging expertise. Supervisors also may be able to provide a flexible schedule or make changes in an employee's assigned shift to accommodate an academic schedule. The support and respect shown to employees who are seeking additional training or professional development is instrumental in fueling them to strive for high work performance. More information about how to develop and implement effective training programs is available in Chapters 6 and 7.

## Set Performance Goals

The second area for supervisors and managers to concentrate on is the collaborative development of performance goals or a performance checklist with employees. In any employment situation, some form of evaluation of employees must take place. If an employee knows that he or she is doing a good job and that the employer appreciates the work that the employee does, he or she will generally be more motivated to continue performing at a high level. And, if an employee has a clear understanding of what he or she needs to do to meet expectations and feels supported in making this effort, he or she likely will be more motivated to improve job performance.

It is important to communicate to new employees, upon hire, basic expectations regarding job performance. To be most effective, this communication should be both

verbal and written. Providing employees with a written copy of their job expectations allows them to reflect on the expectations at various points throughout their employment. It provides employees a benchmark of initial and ongoing expectations. Explaining basic expectations, however, is not enough with regard to employee motivation. Since each employee has different interests, skills, and strengths, performance goals must also be individualized. For example, if an employee masters the basic expectations in the first 3 months of employment, his or her goals need to immediately be modified to reflect these achievements. Otherwise, the employee may lose motivation to perform if he or she spends the next 9 months with nothing to strive for. Conversely, if an employee is struggling to reach all of the initial expectations, it may be important to break them down into achievable components so that the employee experiences success.

Supervisors should work collaboratively with each employee to generate performance goals. These goals should be specific, measurable, and observable, much like the goals that are written for individuals who receive supports. Something is measurable if it can be counted and observable if it can be seen. It is critical for the employee to be directly involved in the goal setting. It is the supervisor's responsibility to help the employee set challenging goals that offer the opportunity to stretch to attain a higher level of performance. It is equally important, however, that the supervisor help the employee to set realistic and attainable goals. Thus, the employee's motivation in his or her job comes from trying to meet and possibly exceed their goals.

Long-range goals can seem overwhelming or intimidating to some employees. For these employees, performance checklists could be useful. To create a performance checklist, the supervisor and employee should brainstorm to develop a list of the duties that the employee performs each day. The employee may feel motivated by using that checklist and feeling good when he or she is able to cross every item off the list each day. Over time the supervisor and the employee may negotiate adding things to the checklist that pertain to a special skill or interest that the employee has. Adding or changing the checklist may likely maintain the list's motivational properties. Supervisors should remember, however, that not all employees are alike and that some may be annoyed by the use of a checklist. Some employees may feel the checklist is an indication that the supervisor has no confidence in them as employees. In such cases, longer-range goals may be adequate. Chapter 13 contains more information about measuring competence and assessing performance.

## Recognize Employees

Supervisors and managers can also have an impact on employee motivation through the recognition of positive employee efforts and accomplishments. Recognition is an important aspect of keeping employees. Unfortunately, although it is a simple and cost-effective strategy, it is often overlooked as a viable solution to retention problems. Employers often focus on wages as the primary incentive they can offer employees. This solution, however, is shortsighted. Employees often identify less tangible aspects of their jobs as the most motivating and important (Nelson, 1994). Employees need concrete feedback and appreciation for what they do. They want to feel they are an important part of the organization's success, and they desire for managers and co-workers

to notice and acknowledge their performance. Most people are not attracted to the human services field for the wages and future earnings. The job is never done, and few DSPs ever become wealthy. Therefore, it is important to take notice of and seek opportunities to acknowledge the value of the work DSPs do every day in their jobs. Because organizations have limited financial resources, it is all the more important for them to offer other forms of recognition for employee skill and contribution to the organization. The next several subsections describe many ways in which supervisors and managers can acknowledge or recognize employees for their efforts and contributions.

### Use Various Forms of Recognition

In one study 58% and 76% of employees reported that they had not received verbal or written thanks from their supervisors, respectively (Nelson & Economy, 2003). Employees desire the appreciation of their supervisors. A word of thanks or a quick handwritten note from a supervisor gives meaning to an employee's work. Saying thank you is not the only form of recognition, but it is a great place to start. It is simple, costs next to nothing, and for many employees is very important. When sharing gratitude with an employee, it is important to be specific so that the employee knows what behavior they demonstrated is being recognized (e.g., not just "Good work," but "Great job on dealing with that crisis last week" or "I know things have been a little stressful recently, and I wanted to thank you for how well you've been handling everything at the work site").

Recognition also can be more formal, such as in contests, reward or point programs, or advancement opportunities (Dykstra, 1999; Nelson 1994). In a formal approach to recognizing employees, it is important to create a ritual, a way for everyone to become involved and develop an appreciation for that particular reward program (Dykstra & Gustafson, 1999). Demonstrating consistency and fairness throughout a formal recognition process is essential. If careful consideration is not given to fairness and consistency, DSPs will become frustrated and the recognition program may backfire. In *The Exemplar Employee: Rewarding and Recognizing Outstanding Direct Contact Employees*, Dykstra and Gustafson (1999) described a formal ritual of recognizing exemplar employees (e.g., employee-of-the-month award). They describe the process of developing a ritual as one that takes time and needs continual maintenance. The ritual must have set criteria from which to operate. The organization must develop rules and guidelines with regard to how each exemplar employee is chosen (i.e., a nomination process) and how employees are notified (Dykstra & Gustafson, 1999). The reward itself should also be consistent, whether it is a financial reward, dinner for two, or tickets to a play or a sports event. When formal recognition programs exist, supervisors and managers have important roles in informing employees about the programs, encouraging participation, and deciding if the formal recognition program will be competitive or noncompetitive. Competitive recognition events may include rewarding the employee with the fewest documentation errors or the best attendance record. Noncompetitive formal recognition events include giving an award for average tenure at the organization, providing recognition for completing orientation or probation, and so forth.

Recognition may also be provided through less formal means such as an organization's annual banquet, by the authorization of additional time off (paid or unpaid),

or the offering of flexible time (Dykstra, 1999; Nelson 1994). Informal recognition is often more satisfying than formal recognition to some employees. Informal recognition can take the form of no-cost, low-cost, or higher-cost rewards. Table 9.1 provides some ideas for informal recognition strategies.

Supervisors can provide recognition to employees as individuals or as teams (Dykstra, 1999). Employees are often motivated when they can work collaboratively to achieve a goal. When reflecting on the different ways to recognize employees, an organization can be creative and recognize people not only for their individual efforts within the organization but also for their efforts on a work team. Nationally

**Table 9.1.**  Informal recognition strategies

| | |
|---|---|
| No cost | Verbal thank you |
| | Verbal praise for a specific action |
| | A note of thanks on organization letterhead or on the supervisor's business card |
| | Certificates of achievement |
| | Inclusion of recognized direct support professional (DSP) in decision making for the organization |
| | Newsletter article describing staff accomplishments or important personal events (e.g., graduation) |
| | Recognition of birthdays or anniversaries |
| | Delegation of tasks (doing so says "I believe in you") |
| | Congratulations to someone who handles a really tough situation well |
| | Recognition cards completed by co-workers or individuals supported posted on a bulletin board |
| | Acknowledgment of concern for personal circumstances (e.g., death, birth, graduation from college, illness, child graduation) |
| | Having the supervisor or manager do the DSP's job for 1 hour or 1 day |
| | Respect given to DSP the same way other professionals would be respected |
| | Recognition of tenure benchmarks (starting at 6 months or 1 year) |
| Low cost | Clothing with company logo |
| | Dinner with the supervisor or manager |
| | Gift certificate |
| | Plaques, trophies, and awards |
| | Team dinner or outing |
| | Tickets to a concert |
| | Fees paid to attend a local professional conference |
| | Flowers |
| | Baked treats |
| | A bunch of balloons |
| | Day off for individual or the entire group |
| | Paid time off to take a college class |
| Higher cost | $25 check on each person's birthday |
| | Small pay raise |
| | Small cash award ($20–$50) with a personal thank-you note |
| | $100 for the best innovative solution to a problem at a staff meeting |
| | Organizationwide celebration (picnic or holiday party) |
| | Promotion to a new position |
| | All-expenses-paid weekend at a bed and breakfast |
| | Fees paid to attend a professional conference in another city or state |

*Sources:* Harvey, 2000; Nelson, 1994.

recognized management expert Bob Nelson (1994) recommended that supervisors "catch . . . employees doing things right." He also suggested that it is important to notice the small things that employees do well and to make a *big* deal out of them. It is also important to make sure that efforts are made to "feed" employees regularly with praise and recognition for the things that they do well. This extra effort is sure to result in employees who are happier and more motivated.

When considering the recognition of an individual employee, it is important to focus on the employee's performance (Nelson & Economy, 2003). It is also important to link the recognition of an employee's performance to the organization's goals and objectives (Dykstra, 1999; Nelson & Economy, 2003). A supervisor may find that recognizing employees becomes easier if the supervisor knows them as people and understand the ways in which they like to be recognized (Dykstra, 1999; Harvey, 2000; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999; Nelson, 1994; Nelson & Economy, 2003). For example, when recognizing an employee for volunteering to cover a vacant shift time after time, it would be nice to reward the employee with something that *the employee* would really appreciate. It would be ineffective and embarrassing to purchase Neil Diamond tickets for an employee as a reward only to find out later that he or she prefers AC/DC, *NSYNC, or Michael W. Smith. Or, perhaps recognizing birthdays of employees with a cake, balloons, and singing at staff meetings is a cultural norm within the organization. If the employee, however, is embarrassed or is uncomfortable being the center of attention in large groups, this practice will backfire. The recognition will be a negative experience instead of a positive one for that employee. Taking the time to know how employees would like to be recognized and what types of rewards they would like makes recognition effective and fun.

Several times within this chapter, we have stated that each employee is motivated by different things and likes to be recognized in different ways. One way to ensure that employees get the kind of recognition they desire from supervisors and managers is to ask them early on in their employment (perhaps as a component of new hire paperwork) how they are best motivated and how they like to be recognized. The tools at the end of this chapter include an inventory that supervisors and managers can give to employees to discover what employees want and need in order to effectively be recognized and motivated.

### Incorporate Recognition into the Organization's Culture

Organizations need to create recognition within their daily operations. Recognition for good work needs to become routine. In addition to annual events such as employee dinners or monthly events such as naming an employee of the month, more frequent recognition is needed to recognize newer employees. Employees and managers need to develop awareness of the importance and power of recognition and motivation opportunities.

Supervisors play a fundamental role in influencing managers and employees. It is important for supervisors to advocate for the inclusion of employee recognition into daily operations. One way to accomplish this is to make employee recognition part of the organization's strategic plan, supervisor and manager training curricula, and policy development. Supervisors should be prepared to discuss different personal experi-

ences of how the recognition of employees has benefited the organization and ultimately affected staff retention.

### Follow the Basics of Effective Recognition

Though many recognition strategies are pretty simple, recognition is not likely to occur just because an organization or a supervisor wants it to. Too often, many workers feel as though they do not have time or energy to look for every opportunity to provide recognition to co-workers or employees. Supervisors, co-workers, and even administrators need training and suggestions about how to do recognition well. To be effective, recognition needs to have criteria. Ultimately, it cannot be mandated; rather it should be sincere, specific, heartfelt, and based on accurate information. It is often more demoralizing for employees to receive insincere, general, or rote recognition than to receive none at all. When recognition is given, it is usually provided to employees that are in good standing and are liked by all; however, recognition is also critical for employees who are not performing well. In these situations, the added positive recognition may be all it takes to motivate a poorly performing employee to improve performance.

Opinions vary about what constitutes effective recognition. Some basic tenets, however, apply to delivering effective recognition to employees (Deeprose, 1994; Dykstra, 1999; Harvey, 2000; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999; Nelson & Economy, 2003; Russell, 1999):

- Recognition must be sincere.
- Recognition must be heartfelt.
- Recognition must be specific.
- Recognition must be purposeful.
- Recognition is best when it is immediate.
- Recognition may be given publicly or privately.
- Recognition can be spontaneous.
- Recognition must be positive.
- Recognition must be geared to the individual (personalized).

### Don't Forget Long-Term Employees

It is easy to focus only on finding ways to enhance recognition for new employees to encourage them to stay. But to do so without first recognizing long-term employees is a recipe for disaster and will alienate long-term employees and undermine efforts to build teamwork and camaraderie. Before a bonus or incentive program to find or keep new hires is implemented, be sure that the current staff members have been adequately recognized. If an organization creates a new welcoming program to provide new hires with T-shirts, pens, or mugs bearing the organization, the organization should be sure that current staff receive their T-shirts, pens, or mugs first. Other strategies that can be used to recognize long-term employees include the following:

- Provide bigger year-end bonuses for longer-term employees (e.g., $10 per year of service, paid in December).

- Make sure that there is a reasonable salary spread between new and long-term employees. It is very disruptive to morale to hire new employees at only 25 cents an hour less than employees with 5 or more years of experience.
- Reward years of service (but don't wait for a person to have 5 years' experience—start with 6 months or 1 year of service).

Programs of recognition that favor new over longer-term employees can have serious detrimental effects on longer-term employees. It is important for organizations to consider the potential ramifications of any new recognition program.

## Watch Out for Pitfalls!

Defining the guidelines for recognition programs, providing training on how to select recognition activities, and carefully planning how to effectively use recognition to improve employee motivation are all important components of any company-sanctioned or -sponsored recognition program. If an organization does not attend to these issues, the recognition program may fail. An example of a recognition program gone bad is one that recognizes a long-term employee for her 10 years of service with a pen bearing the organization logo (valued at $30) and provides a new hire who has made it through his first year of employment with a $500 retention bonus.

When recognizing employees, the organization should be certain to reinforce only the behaviors the organization wants repeated (Dykstra, 1999; Harvey, 2000; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999; Nelson, 1994; Nelson & Economy, 2003). If the goal is to increase the quality of on-the-job performance, the organization should reward and recognize employees for improved performance, not simply for maintaining performance (Nelson & Economy, 2003). Recognizing people for solely doing their basic job requirements may not improve performance or increase motivation. Carefully thinking through what types of employee behaviors should be recognized is critical for success.

It is important to be aware of other pitfalls to recognition programs (Russell, 1999; see Table 9.2). Organizations can use the worksheet called Identifying Effective Recognition Events, Activities, or Processes that appears at the end of this chapter to determine the effectiveness of its existing recognition efforts and to develop other strategies for employee recognition.

## Use Other Strategies for Recognizing Employees

Creating new and doable challenges for staff and providing opportunities for employees to recharge and renew are important strategies for supervisors to employ. Helping employees prevent burnout, stay focused, and remain charged in an everchanging field is an important role for supervisors and managers. This support is especially important for long-term employees, who often are overlooked by employers and supervisors.

Supervisors can be creative in providing employees with fresh challenges and renewal opportunities. As employees' individuality becomes clearer, supervisors can pay attention to the things that the employees enjoy doing the most. Supervisors should learn about their employees' hobbies and how they pass the time. Then, supervisors can create ways in which employees can use their skills. For example, if a DSP enjoys bike riding, consider having that employee hold a bike maintenance class for individuals he or she supports who also enjoy bike riding. If an employee appreciates boats

**Table 9.2.** How to avoid common pitfalls of employee recognition programs

Keep in mind that money and other financial rewards are not always the most successful ways to recognize and motivate employees.

Make recognition an important part of the job, or employees will not value it that much.

Dissuade an employee's sense of entitlement with regard to rewards; if an employee expects the recognition, he or she may not see it as a reward anymore.

Do not delay the recognition of someone who is doing a good job; let him or her know right away!

An effective form of recognition or reward is one that is personalized and meaningful. Avoid generic and mundane rewards.

*Sources:* Harvey, 2000; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999; Nelson, 1994; Nelson & Economy, 2003; Russell, 1999.

and cars, consider having that employee attend a boat or automobile show with an individual whom he or she supports who has similar interests. If employees seem simply "fried" and exhausted from working so much overtime, make arrangements with the local school of massage for employees to have free or low-cost massages.

Opportunities for employees to learn about new things that are happening in the field may also be sources of recharge and renewal. Chances for DSPs to network with employees from other organization sites or with employees from other local organizations also can be invigorating. Perhaps an employee could attend a local or state conference as a reward or as part of an incentive program. Or, maybe a sponsor or manager could skip attending a conference so that a DSP could attend. The connections made validate what the DSP does, permit the DSP to meet new colleagues and learn new strategies, and give the employee a sense of professionalism and purpose (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of networking and professionalization).

Providing staff more autonomy in their work and fostering a sense of pride in the success of the organization is also essential to retention of employees. Managers and supervisors should ensure that DSPs are always involved in the process of reassessing and modifying the organization's mission and vision. Organizations should challenge themselves to see DSPs as the ambassadors of the organization to the outside world.

## In the Spotlight: Happy Notes

This activity, created and used by REM Central Lakes, of St. Cloud, Minnesota, encourages people to work together, to attend staff meetings, and to recognize the good deeds team members are doing for each other as a routine part of their job.

The idea is to get co-workers to recognize each other for what they do to support each other. Starting with the FLS, who usually has to set the example, have the employees who work together write little thank-you notes (Happy Notes) for helping each other out. For example, "To Mary — Just wanted to say thanks for picking up that extra shift. It really made my job easier. Signed, Bob," "To Jessie — Thanks for doing the laundry; it was great to come on duty and not have to worry whether I would have time to get it done or not! Signed, Selma," and so forth.

Then the notes are placed in a Happy Notes box. (Use a cardboard box that is about one foot square, with a slit cut in the top so that staff can deposit the Happy Notes. Make

sure you can reuse the box and that it is easily opened.) Instruct the staff to put their notes into the Happy Notes box and to write as many Happy Notes to each other as possible before the next staff meeting.

At the next staff meeting, either before or after dealing with items on the business agenda, the supervisor opens the Happy Notes box and reads each of the Happy Notes out loud. Then the notes are put back in the box along with slips of paper with the names of each person at the staff meeting, and one is drawn as the winner. Some supervisors require staff to be present to win. The winner receives a small thank-you gift. It can be a $5–$10 gift certificate, a small candle, a flower, a box of candy, or something similar. After the staff meeting, the employees are encouraged to continue writing Happy Notes to each other, and the process starts over.

This idea was provided by Kristine Wainright-Tadych, Regional Director for REM Central Lakes, St. Cloud, MN, 320-259-6022.

## OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Numerous factors can be barriers to the use of effective recognition and motivation strategies:

- Supervisors and managers treat all employees the same and use identical strategies of motivation and recognition for all.
- Recognition is mandated but not supported at all levels of the organization.
- There is unfair and inconsistent use of recognition and motivation strategies.
- New programs of recognition are implemented without consideration for long-term employees who may not have had similar opportunities.
- Recognition occurs during annual events instead of also being incorporated into daily operations.
- Recognition is provided for meeting basic expectations rather than for going above and beyond minimal expectations.

To overcome these barriers, organizations need to train supervisors about the principles of effective motivation. Furthermore, managers and administrators should model effective recognition approaches. For motivation and recognition strategies to work, supervisors and managers need to understand and learn from their employees how they like to be recognized and provide recognition designed to motivate that individual employee. Organizations must ensure that any formal recognition programs are implemented fairly and with similar levels of commitment and enthusiasm by all supervisors and managers. It is also important for organizations to consider how long-term employees may feel when new recognition programs are put into place. Finally, for recognition programs to be most effective, they need to be developed with input from DSPs and should never be forced upon any employee.

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What motivates you to do more or better work?
2. How do you like to be recognized?

3. How do you motivate and recognize the people you supervise?
4. What formal recognition programs exist within your organization? Are they fair, equitable, and consistently used? Explain why or why not.
5. Is recognition a part of daily operations within your organization? In what informal ways do your organization's supervisors, managers, and administrators recognize employees?
6. How are long-term employees motivated and recognized within your organization?
7. What professional development opportunities exist for employees who are motivated by growth and new learning?

## CONCLUSION

Recognition is a critical component of an effective workforce intervention strategy. Encouraging and supporting effective recognition practices can result in improved workforce outcomes. Developing motivation and providing recognition to employees are relatively simple and inexpensive retention strategies. Employees are motivated by different intrinsic and/or extrinsic factors. An organization should get to know its employees and tailor the ways in which recognition and motivation are provided to each individual. When efforts are made to create organizational cultures that expect and support recognition, employee commitment to the organization and motivation are more likely to increase.

## RESOURCES

Kaye, B.L., & Jordan-Evans, S. (1999). *Love 'em or lose 'em: Getting good people to stay.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

This book has one chapter for each letter of the alphabet, with advice for supervisors and managers about how to support and recognize employees. Chapters discuss topics such as knowing what employees want; helping employees find growth and challenge within the organization; helping employees find the work they love without leaving; and offering balance and support to employees who are sick or tired.

Nelson, B. (1994). *1001 ways to reward employees.* New York: Workman Publishing.

This book is great for supervisors or managers who know they should be recognizing their employees but are not quite sure what to do. The premise of the book is that "money isn't everything." The book lists many low- or no-cost strategies and is full of examples and stories about recognizing staff for doing a good job. Book sections include informal rewards, awards for specific achievements and activities, and formal rewards. Appendices share where to get specialty reward items; profile companies that arrange unusual reward activities; and list incentive travel coordinators, motivational and incentive companies, and associations.

Nelson, B., & Economy, P. (2003). *Managing for dummies* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

This easy-to-read book provides comprehensive information on management. Its six main sections are So You Want to Be a Manager?, Managing: The People Part, Making Things Happen, Working with (Other) People, Tough Times for Tough Managers, and Tools and Techniques for Managing. A seventh section, The Part of Tens, provides top-ten lists related to management

issues, such as Ten Common Management Mistakes, the Ten Best Ways to Recognize Employees, and Ten Classic Business Books that You Need to Know About. As in all of the "for Dummies" books, icons in the margins call your attention to important information.

Reid, D.H., & Parsons, M.B. (1995). *Motivating human service staff: Supervisory strategies for maximizing work effort and work enjoyment.* Morganton, NC: Habilitative Management Consultants.

This book has valuable information about motivating employees and creating an enjoyable work environment. The authors have a positive perspective, focusing on strengths and opportunities rather than deficits and problems. The 10 chapters are separated into 3 sections; Introduction to Motivation, Enhancing Diligent and Competent Work Performance, and Enhancing the Work Environment. This book is a great addition to the library or "tool box" of all human services supervisors, managers, and administrators!

Sharpe, C., & Bruen, A. (Eds.). (1997). How to motivate employees. *Info-line*(Issue 9108). Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

This booklet provides a short but useful overview of strategies to motivate employees. It examines theories such as Theory X/Theory Y, motivation, and hygiene as explanations for employee behavior. It provides many suggestions for improving motivation practices in an organization and lists an array of other available resources.

# Recognition and Motivation Inventory

1.  What gets you excited about your job and makes you want to come to work every day?

    _____

    _____

2.  What things demoralize you on the job and make it difficult for you to come to work every day?

    _____

    _____

3.  When you do a good job, how would you like your supervisor to acknowledge you?

    _____

    _____

4.  Describe the last time someone told you that you did a good job. How did you feel about that? What, if anything, would you have changed about the way that person told you that you were doing a good job?

    _____

    _____

5.  From this list of "rewards" please circle the ones that are meaningful to you. Put a line through any that would specifically make you uncomfortable or that you would not want. List additional rewards that are meaningful to you.

    Balloons
    Bonus check
    Candy
    Chocolate
    Clothing with organization logo
    Consumer electronics (CD player,
        MP3 player, personal digital assistant)
    Day off
    Flowers
    Funny cards
    Gift certificate (Where?) _____
    Jewelry with organization logo
    Lunch out with co-workers
    Lunch out with supervisor
    Membership in a professional association
    Movie tickets
    Mug with organization logo
    Office supplies with organization logo
        (e.g., pens, paper)
    Overnight lodging to attend conference
        or training

    Personal note
    Plants
    Private praise
    Professional conference registration
    Professional journal subscription
    Public praise (staff meeting, newsletter)
    Recognition ceremony/banquet
    Serious cards
    Special snacks at work (What?) _____

    _____

    Sports tickets
    Other ideas:

    _____

    _____

    _____

6.  When your performance needs to be improved, how would you like your supervisor to let you know? What kinds of assistance help you improve your performance?

    _____

    _____

# Identifying Effective Recognition Events, Activities, or Processes

As a supervisor or manager, evaluate your organization's current recognition activities to determine their effectiveness. First, identify a recognition event or program that you want to review (e.g., employee-of-the-month award). Next, place an *X* under the appropriate frequency column (*Always, Sometimes,* or *Never*) that most describes how your organization uses each characteristic in the targeted recognition program. Last, complete the questions that follow.

Recognition activity to be reviewed: _____

| Characteristic | Frequency | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Always** | **Sometimes** | **Never** |
| Sincere | | | |
| Heartfelt | | | |
| Specific | | | |
| Purposeful | | | |
| Immediate | | | |
| Public | | | |
| Private | | | |
| Spontaneous | | | |
| Positive | | | |
| Individualized | | | |

1.  In reviewing how you evaluated the occurrence of each characteristic, do you feel as though the targeted recognition event or program is effective? If so, why? If not, why not?

    _____

    _____

2.  What changes could your organization make to the existing event or program to make it a more effective form of recognition? _____

    _____

    _____

3.  Can you identify any other forms of recognition that your organization uses that would be more effective than the one you selected for this exercise? Repeat the exercise to evaluate that program.

    _____

    _____