



National Association for Employee Recognition

2004 BEST PRACTICES

A Summary Report Highlighting the Application
of Best Recognition Practices at
**La Porte Regional Health System &
Michigan Department of Transportation**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..... 3

Categories Overview..... 4

Sample Evaluation Sheet 5

La Porte Regional Health System — 2004 Best Overall Recognition Program

Best in Class—Recognition Program Goal Alignment

Best in Class—Behavior Based Program

Best in Class—Celebration/Recognition Events

Best in Class—Process/Program Change & Flexibility

La Porte Case Study..... 6

La Porte Summary..... 14

Michigan Department of Transportation

Best in Class—Recognition Program Communication Plan

MDOT Case Study..... 17

MDOT Summary..... 21

Credits 22

INTRODUCTION

The National Association for Employee Recognition (NAER) is dedicated to the advancement of recognition in the workplace. To help set standards of employee recognition, NAER sponsors an annual review of nominees for “best practices” in 9 strategic categories, two of which are mandatory for basic consideration—any organization hoping to be a Best Practices recipient must meet them—and seven optional categories which differentiate and identify various elements of recognition, expanding recognition beyond the basics. Individually, the results of the categories can have a substantial impact on an organization’s recognition success.

When fully implemented together, the nine elements will ensure a truly powerful and strategic recognition program for any organization.

The standards were developed based on exhaustive research, including findings from the American Productivity Center, the knowledge of respected recognition practitioners, recognition literature, case studies, selection criteria for Fortune magazine’s 100 Best Companies, Working Mother magazine’s 100 Most Family Friendly Companies, and to a degree, the Baldrige Award for methodology.

Organizations are either self-nominated or nominated by a third party. The Selection of Best Practices companies is by a panel of independent recognition professionals. Judges participate in accordance with the Code of Ethical Standards to ensure a selection process that is fair and based solely on the Best Practices Standards.

It is important to note: NAER does not attempt to select one organization that fits all nine criteria. Rather, the attempt is to identify best practices individually. If no organization qualifies for a specific practice, none will be selected. If one organization is a leader in majority of categories, that organization is determined “Overall Best Practices” for the year, as is the case this year for La Porte Regional Health System. In 2004, just two companies were selected as representing best practices (six organizations were nominated). As many as seven different organizations *could* be selected representing best practices of the seven optional categories.

Congratulations to La Porte Regional Health System and Michigan Department of Transportation, who join TELUS and CalPERS (both 2002 recipients) as National Association for Employee Recognition Best Practices recipients.

Categories Overview

A basic overview—full criteria for each category may be found at www.recognition.org

1. **Management Responsibility** (Required): Demonstrates that an organization's executives and management take responsibility for a well-defined recognition program and are committed to the program's objectives.
2. **Recognition Strategy** (Required): Demonstrates that the organization has established and documented process(es) that promotes employee recognition at all organizational levels, including day-to-day, informal, and formal recognition.
3. **Recognition Program Communication Plan**: Demonstrates that the organization has established and utilizes an effective system to communicate all aspects of their recognition program.
4. **Recognition Program Goal Alignment**: The organization demonstrates alignment between the recognition program and organizational goals and values.
5. **Behavioral Based Programs**: The organization has well-defined business goals and organizational values, including employee behaviors that reflect those values.
6. **Recognition Program Measurement**: The organization demonstrates how recognition programs are measured for effectiveness, using established measurement indicators or tools. There shall be at least one year of data. The organization also describes how they use statistics to validate employee participation and satisfaction levels in the recognition program.
7. **Recognition Training**: The organization describes its methods for training managers and employees at all levels on the principles of effective recognition, and the methods of documenting the objectives of the training and curriculum.
8. **Recognition Events & Celebrations**: Shows that the organization has processes in place for organizing celebrations and events, provides necessary resources for events, documents the event, and uses creativity and uniqueness in these events.
9. **Recognition Process/Program Change & Flexibility**: Shows that the organization's recognition programs can be easily adjusted to meet new goals as the organization changes, or as different needs arise.

Sample Evaluation Sheet—
representing the evaluation process used by the Selection Committee in
determining best recognition practices

	Strongly agree 4	3	2	Strongly disagree 1	N/A
Standard 6) Recognition Program Measurement					
1. The organization demonstrates how recognition programs are measured for effectiveness.					
2. The organization establishes measurement indicators or tools.					
3. The measures are statistically valid and substantive in nature.					
4. There is at least one year of data.					
5. The organization documents the level of employee participation in recognition programs.					
6. The organization documents the level of employee satisfaction in recognition programs.					
7. The organization demonstrates how employee satisfaction levels are measured.					

**La Porte Regional Health System—
Best Overall Recognition Practices 2004**

For exceptional achievement in the following:

- Standard 4: Recognition Program Goal Alignment
- Standard 5: Behavioral Based Program
- Standard 8: Best Celebration/Recognition Events
- Standard 9: Process/Program Change & Flexibility
- **NOTE: La Porte does not use the word “program” in connection with recognition, rather they call it a “system.” Because most companies call it a “program,” both words are used interchangeably in this story—“system” refers specifically to La Porte’s efforts, “program” refers to the generic concept.**

Recognition I.V. – Straight to the Heart

Healthcare in America is a challenging business. The never-ending battle to keep skyrocketing costs in check while providing top-rate service to a demanding public means that healthcare employees have very demanding jobs.

News reports frequently cite the difficulty in retaining skilled medical workers, especially nursing staff.

Can recognition help?

According to La Porte Regional Health System (La Porte), it certainly can—and does!

Recognition First Aid—Make it Immediate!

La Porte has created an innovative recognition system that makes recognition available to every employee—at any time. Previously, their recognition system was nomination-based, and limited to one employee per month, for a total of 12 people recognized each year (out of 1,400 employees).

By getting rid of nomination-based programs, La Porte has created a system called **Caught You Caring**

that allows for effective and powerful recognition without delay.

“Our team feels strongly that recognition should *not* be nomination-based,” notes



Facts & Figures

With a history going back to 1841, La Porte Regional Health System serves approximately 90,000 in- and out-patients a year, with a physician network of 14 facilities.

- Employees: 1,400
- Ownership: Non-profit
- Headquarters: La Porte, Indiana
- Revenues: exceed \$120 million
- Annual recognition budget: \$165,000 or \$145 per FTE/PTE, \$9,000 of this is specifically allocated to TAG.
- **Recognition Staff: 2 full-time, plus multi-disciplinary TAG Team (Thanks-Appreciation-Gratitude) of 12 members**
- www.laportehhealth.org

TAG Team facilitator (recognition manager) Kay Clark-Cox. "Everyone should be recognized for the good work they accomplish, regardless of what anyone else has done. With our system, there are no limits to the number of people that can be celebrated for going above and beyond. We call our TAG criteria a system, not a program. A program has a beginning and an end and recognition should never end." "Our other motto is 'when in doubt recognize'. No one ever left an organization because they got thanked too much. It is just the opposite."

Opening the Heart Requires a Team *Management Responsibility*

La Porte management believes in recognition.

It starts from the top down, with CEO Jonathan Goble. "I have been leading hospitals for over 20 years," he notes, "and my experience has demonstrated that the best way to increase the probability of repeated positive behavior is to recognize it! We are so quick to come down on negative behavior and so slow to praise positive behavior that it is no wonder employees are confused. The investment is small. The payoff is huge. Seems pretty simple to me."

Spread the Joy, Share the Responsibility Recognition System

La Porte Regional Health System supports a variety of recognition efforts, ensuring that people throughout the organization are recognized for various reasons, in appropriate ways, and in a timely manner. Each recognition initiative is managed by a different department. Spreading responsibility throughout the organization is an excellent way to gain broader buy-in for recognition initiatives. La Porte's efforts include:

Recognition Tackle Box: Annually, each director in the organization receives a "tackle box" filled with recognition instructions, gift certificates for local businesses, and a supply of "Caught You Caring" forms. *Responsible: Patient Care Recruitment and Retention Committee.*

Patient Satisfaction Awards: Few businesses are as close to their customers as healthcare. Twice each year, La Porte recognizes departments that meet specific criteria in patient satisfaction, called the "Arbor Excellence Awards." These celebrations include a traveling banner, a small award for each employee, and certificates. *Responsible: Director of Customer Relations*

Champions in Quality Improvement: This effort recognizes teams that have excelled in at least one of several defined areas of quality improvement such as:

1. Develop and implement a process improvement that benefits multiple disciplines.
2. Exhibit compliance with a regulatory standard that was historically non-compliant for at least 3 months.
3. Show significant improvement on a department-specific quality indicator, and maintain for 6 months.
4. Redesign a process for substantial cost savings.

Responsible: Quality Improvement Department

Length of Service Awards: La Porte executives host an annual dinner for employees and family members reaching five-year increments. The themed event includes a PowerPoint show highlighting achievements, entertainment, and dancing.

Responsible: Human Resources Department

Other Recognition: All-employee holiday dinner, holiday \$50 gift card, Thanksgiving gift certificate to local grocer, free birthday lunch coupon, and monthly birthday drawing for \$25 gift card.

Responsible: HR and Employee Activity Committee.

Clark-Cox reports directly to Goble. “[Jonathan’s] only direction was ‘make it meaningful and a system that would last,” she explains. “He has supported our efforts 100%. He shares the Caught You Caring forms at all board meetings, he attends all celebrations, and yearly welcomes each newly re-grouped TAG Team.”

Not only does Goble’s executive group fund the system at a level that’s yet to be fully used (sound like a dream?), they also allow a group of already-busy healthcare workers to dedicate time and resources to the recognition effort.

This team, called “The TAG Team” (for **T**hanks, **A**ppreciation, **G**ratitude) is comprised of front-line staff members from such diverse areas as nursing, environmental services, and diagnostic imaging. The team functions as a sub-group of La Porte’s Quality & Service Council. Just like the bones of a body, a well-connected, diverse team ensures a well-rounded system that truly meets the needs of a broad employee base.

“The TAG Team has primary responsibility for creating and managing spontaneous recognition efforts at La Porte,” explains Clark-Cox.

Every team member serves for a two-year period. Each May, half the group retires, and new members are brought on board. The rotation of team members ensures a good supply of fresh ideas. The TAG Team has authorization to adapt and change the system as they see fit.

This level of involvement, coupled with responsibility placed on various departments throughout the organization (see sidebar, previous

page), demonstrates the value La Porte management places on recognition.

Being a member of the TAG Team has been more fun and fulfilling than anything I have been involved with at the hospital.

The entire recognition process has brought the employees together as a team, striving to be the best they can be and provide the best possible service to our customers and community.

— Shirley Howell,
Honorary TAG Team Member

Proper Alignment Solves More Than Back Aches *Recognition Program Goal Alignment*

Aligning recognition efforts with the organization’s goals is “one of the foundations of the Caught You Caring system,” says Clark-Cox.

In 1999, La Porte Regional Health System re-established their vision statement to be, “Number one provider of healthcare, no matter what it takes, and have FUN doing it.” They established “standards” for all employees. The standards are:

- Integrity
- Commitment
- Communication
- Timeliness of Service
- Appearance

“These are the basis for all we do,” Clark-Cox explains. “The TAG Team’s philosophy that every employee’s above-and-beyond behavior should be consistently recognized by their peers and organization fit the [organization’s goals] perfectly.”

The TAG Team continually focuses on the organization's goals, and ensures that every new recognition initiative they come up with fits with La Porte's vision and standards.

Behave Yourself—Doctor's Orders
Behavioral Based Programs

When the first TAG Team met to create La Porte's recognition systems, they set in stone their belief that recognition should be instant and available. When an employee behaves in a way that deserves to be recognized, that behavior should be noted immediately in a meaningful way.

"The goal of changing our recognition system from a nomination format to a spontaneous format was to create a culture-change based on appreciation at the employee level," Clark-Cox explains.

Minutes from an early TAG Team meeting clearly list the behavior-based principles that continue to guide La Porte's recognition efforts:

- System must tie directly to [organization's] vision
- System must support our Customer Care Standards (as previously listed)
- System and team MUST be fun
- System needs different levels of recognition
- System needs to accommodate large groups or teams

How could you not recognize everyone?

There are so many reasons to recognize people that TAG Team member Mark Huffman can't imagine not making it available to everyone.

"Where do you start?" he asks. "From someone doing CPR on a teenager at a basketball game, to doing the Heimlich maneuver on an employee in the cafeteria, to giving a patient a stuffed animal for being inconvenienced, giving clothes to someone you don't know and may never see again, giving money to someone who is stranded in the middle of Indiana, helping at Christmas, giving back to those needing it more than they do—they are all great, and to pick one would, in my eyes, seem to lessen the rest."

- Recognition must be constant
- System should include volunteers and physicians
- System should have flexibility to customize recognition to departments
- System needs to establish written guidelines for recognition

All of La Porte's recognition programs (refer to sidebar, page 9), reinforce the organization's desired behaviors.

The most ready form of recognition continues to be La Porte's "Caught You Caring" initiative. Forms (see page 14) are available throughout La Porte's facilities—even in patient rooms. Initially, there was some concern that placing the forms in patient's rooms wouldn't be effective. The opposite has proven

to be the case as patients often recognize staff members.

“Caught You Caring” forms can be used for all levels of accomplishments—from a simple thanks to saving a life. The form is in triplicate, and once it’s filled in the first copy goes to the recipient, and the second is sent to the TAG Team. Eventually the third form is sent to the employee’s director to assist in their performance appraisal as positive proof they have demonstrated the standards of behavior.

The TAG Team then evaluates all the forms sent in, and selects “Star,” “Super Star,” and “Team Star” recipients, based on very specific criteria (see box, this page). These employees are announced during tri-annual TAG celebrations, which all employees are encouraged to attend.

All forms are then publicly displayed on in the hallway of the cafeteria. Forms are changed every two weeks so all can be displayed in a timely manner.

The 20-30 minute celebrations are scheduled several times in one week to give employees maximum flexibility in attending.

Those selected as stars are surprised in front of their peers as their “Caught You Caring” story is read. This is a very powerful, yet very low-cost recognition plan. Stars are given low-cost pins, balloons and certificates, and have their photo taken for the company website and included in a card sent home to the recipient’s family.

Star Performer Criteria

- Step above and beyond behavior for exceptional call of duty
- Something not in the normal or usual job duty
- Specific written example of what was done
- The act was done willingly, not as a part of one’s job
- There are no minimum/maximum numbers of recognition you can receive

Super Star Criteria

- Meets criteria from Star Performer
- Visible tears from the TAG members
- Something makes you say WOW!
- A plan was created, put into action and followed through
- There are no minimum/maximum numbers of recognition you can receive

What They Get

- Star Performer (\$9). Balloon, card, \$5 in fish chips, lots of applause
- Super Star (\$50). Balloon, card signed by CEO and Board President, Super Star pin, South Bend Chocolate Factory basket, \$15 in fish chips, lots of applause and tears
- All Star Team (\$50-100 depends on # in team). Pizza Party, certificate
- Super Star Team (\$50-100 depends on # in team). Super Star pins, Certificate, pizza party, CEO card

A new initiative, called “Department TAGging,” was launched in 2003. Based on numbers of “Caught You Caring” forms received, the TAG Team selects a department that *didn’t* receive a large number of forms, and “tags” the entire department with a quick visit, a giant TAG sign, a certificate, and a bag of personalized gifts. This ensures that departments which aren’t as publicly visible are recognized for their commitment to quality and service.

Nothing influences positive behavior like reinforcing it in front of peers. Among the most visible efforts, La Porte encourages all directors to announce employees who received a “Caught You Caring” during each staff meeting, and to read the stories as appropriate.

A Big Shot In The Arm *Recognition Events & Celebrations*

While anyone closely involved with a recognition program knows it’s not all about planning parties, visible events and celebrations are a key element in

The TAG Team is very sneaky in getting recipients to a celebration. As a director, one of the TAG Team members told me that one of my employees was going to be recognized. So, they wanted to know which celebration I would attend to make sure I was present for [my employee’s] big surprise. Then they contacted my staff to make sure I was escorted to the celebration.

Little did I know that I was the one who would be surprised. It was fun for me, for my staff, and everyone who attended the celebration.

— *Debi Baughman*
Star Performer Recipient



any successful recognition program.

As you might expect, La Porte throws quite a party—actually several parties. The celebrations are held three separate weeks a year, and three times during the week to accommodate various shift workers and offsite employees.

“Each celebration has a unique theme,” Clark-Cox notes, “with free snacks, wild music, the previous Stars PowerPoint show running, and TAG Team members greeting each participant.”

“Executives are *supposed* to take turns attending to visually show their support,” she explains. “But usually, *all of them* show up because it’s so fun!”

A recent event used a “fish” theme, complete with “Fish Chips” for the Star recipients, which they later redeemed for a gift certificate of their choice. An October event took on a Halloween theme, complete with costumes, and another was themed as a beach party, complete with beach balls bouncing through the crowd. Average budget for these events is an affordable \$100-150.

Department directors and TAG Team

members work together beforehand to ensure that no Star recipients miss a celebration. The team also coordinates “on the road” celebrations— in-department visits to an employee who could not attend the celebrations, or to an off-site location such as a physician’s office.

La Porte’s other major recognition event is the annual service award dinner, which always has a fresh theme, new entertainment, and a well-rehearsed script.

Flexibility—A Word From the Physical Therapist... *Program change and flexibility*

It’s been said that the only constant in life is change. Effective employee recognition *requires* constant change and flexibility.

On-the-spot recognition like the “Caught You Caring” system is flexible by nature. When employees understand the system, and are watching for unusual effort or above-and-beyond service, each recognition moment is unique, fresh, and interesting.

However, changes to the actual structure of a program need to be implemented carefully—and based on sound reasoning. La Porte’s team approach to managing and planning recognition ensures that any changes must pass many sets of eyes and ears before the change takes place.

“The TAG Team stays fresh and has new ideas because of the rotation of the members each year,” Clark-Cox notes.

Changes to La Porte’s systems have been based on feedback from recipients, such as allowing people to actually choose what business they would like a gift certificate from. Someone from the TAG Team

occasionally has to make a special trip to obtain a specific gift certificate. But that extra effort pays off in employee satisfaction.

Additionally—and this is an issue common to all organizations—an employee might be truly uncomfortable with high profile, public recognition. When a director indicates to the TAG Team that an employee might feel that way, the team finds an appropriate way to recognize the person without embarrassment. This might mean no celebration at all—perhaps just a pat on the back from the boss—but it is powerful just the same. The TAG Team has even gone to an employee’s home when family involvement was suggested.

Since the organization’s vision and goals aren’t likely to change anytime soon, the recognition program, at its *core*, shouldn’t change much either. After all, its goals are based on the organization’s larger goals.

As a program matures, some policy-based changes are inevitable. La Porte discovered that employees considered their colleagues to have gone above-and-beyond by offering to transport patients in their personal vehicles. While this seemed like a commendable effort, La Porte’s liability coverage prohibits the behavior. So, a policy was set against recognizing it.

Clark-Cox explains, “whatever gets recognized gets repeated, so be sure to match recognition with behavior goals.”

I can speak from first-hand experience how much this [recognition] system has helped our department. When I first arrived in my position as manager of Environmental Services, the turnover rate in the department was twice the national average. Within three years our turnover was down to 0%.

[The employees] felt their work went unnoticed. But now, individuals throughout the organization have let them know how much they are appreciated. Without this system, I do not believe this transformation would have happened.

— Greg Arndt
Director, Environmental Services & Laundry
TAG Team member

known a staff member's name. We started recognizing the physicians, and now they recognize the staff."

But she doesn't give recognition all the credit—Clark-Cox explains that it's part of a bigger cultural shift that started in 2000. The culture is so good, in fact, that La Porte has had nurses on waiting lists for positions, a rare thing indeed.

The success of La Porte's recognition efforts and cultural shifts have even landed them in *Fortune* magazine's 300 best places to work—and they hope to make the top 100 this year.

The Prognosis—Full Health! Results and Conclusions

Does La Porte Regional Health System's innovative approach pay off? Consider these facts:

- A nursing staff turnover of 4%, compared with a national average of 18%.
- Workforce turnover of 9%, compared to 15% industry-wide.
- 1,323 "Caught You Caring" forms submitted in 2003—for an organization of 1,400 employees.
- Marked increase in attendance at celebration events.
- Whirlpool (the appliance company) and Northern Arizona Healthcare have both chosen La Porte's TAG Team system for their recognition efforts.

Clark-Cox observes that the system has made a huge difference in La Porte's morale and culture. "Everyone feels comfortable recognizing each other," she says. "We have physicians and staff who routinely write Caught You Caring forms for staff members. Four years ago, those physicians wouldn't have

The fact that Whirlpool, a marquee-name company from another industry is successfully using the TAG Team model gives further evidence that the concept works very well.

La Porte CEO Jonathan Goble couldn't be happier with the results of this recognition system.

"The TAG Team caught the vision and inspired the entire organization to accomplish great things," he notes.

Take that kind of praise from senior management, add in the results such as reduced turnover and a line-up of prospective employees at the door, and it's clear that La Porte Regional Health System has created a healthy recognition model for any organization to duplicate.

<p>Standard 5: Behavioral Based Program</p> <p>La Porte’s recognition system goals clearly identify the types of behaviors they want to recognize. As such, they chose to eliminate “nomination-based” recognition, allowing for <i>all appropriate behavior to be recognized spontaneously and immediately, in a meaningful way.</i></p>	<p>If your organization’s goals include specific <i>behaviors</i>, ensure that you include them in your recognition strategy—and make sure all communication & training identifies the values as recognize-able behaviors.</p> <p>Ensure that your recognition strategy allows for all appropriate behaviors to be recognized when they occur. This will probably require a shift in thinking for many of your people. Do everything you can to get senior management on board. When they exhibit appropriate recognition, it’s more likely that rank-and-file employees will follow suit.</p>
<p>Standard 8: Best Celebration/Recognition Events</p> <p>La Porte created simple, but effective events. They made them low-cost, and created fun themes. By not taking themselves too seriously, the events have serious results. They made sure the meaning was in the event by publicly reading the stories of Star and Super Star employees and teams.</p> <p>La Porte made sure everyone has a chance to attend by creating an easily repeatable event, and scheduling it several times in a row.</p> <p>La Porte innovated by taking events to the people, in the case of their TAGging departments where they recognize a deserving department with congratulatory signs, gifts, etc.</p> <p>They also made sure senior management was on board from the beginning, and that these leaders were involved at the events in fun and interesting ways.</p>	<p>For informal recognition, don’t over think it. Create events you can manage within your budget. Often, people are happy for the break, a bit of rah-rah, and a free donut.</p> <p>Ensure that there is a <i>reason</i> for the event. Don’t hold an event without a clear strategy—read success stories, highlight star employees, etc.</p> <p>It’s also crucial to plan events at times when everyone can attend.</p> <p>Ensure that you create events appropriate for your organization, and that senior management will <i>want</i> to be part of.</p>

Standard 9: Process/Program Change & Flexibility

La Porte kept a huge degree of flexibility in their system by eliminating nomination-based recognition. By tying to the organization's goals, they allow employees to interpret behaviors when they see them. However, they have shown wisdom in prohibiting the recognition of certain types of behaviors, which could cause the organization liability or legal concerns, such as allowing patient transportation in an employee's private vehicle.

La Porte asks for employee feedback, and implements the suggestions. This is easy for them to do because they haven't burdened their system with cumbersome levels of bureaucracy or expense.

Once you've decided what behaviors are to be recognized, train your management and staff to recognize *appropriate behaviors* on the spot. There's nothing more flexible than that.

Don't burden your program with too many restrictions. Create goals and program materials that clearly outline the *types* of behaviors to recognize, but not the exact behaviors.

Don't lock yourself into owning thousands of gift certificates to a restaurant *you* think employees will like. Experiment, and regularly ask employees and management for feedback.

Proper Signage Helps With the Journey

Imagine a highway with no signs—no warning that your exit is approaching, no guidance for an upcoming curve in the road, no sign telling you that other traffic is about to merge. It would be chaos, and you wouldn't be blamed for staying off the highway altogether.

The workplace is no different. It's crucial to know what the "distance" is for completing a project. You need information about surprise curves that may be ahead. And it really helps to know what "mileposts" you're passing. It's also critical to know "how" to get to your goal, that is, the values to follow when making decisions.

Think of the "mileposts" as the points at which an effective company recognizes its employees—for any number of achievements—as they progress in their careers.

A transportation organization knows the importance of proper signage. The men and women of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) often have thankless jobs. The public expects excellent service and infrastructure in a state filled with challenging weather conditions and rural regions covering almost 57,000 square miles of land.

Obviously, these public-sector employees need to know their work is noticed and appreciated.



Facts & Figures

The Michigan Department of Transportation is a state government agency overseeing Michigan's transportation infrastructure, including roads, bridges, rail routes, and airports.

- Employees: 3,000
- Ownership: Government Agency
Headquarters: Lansing, MI
- Annual Recognition Budget: US \$60,000
- Full-time Recognition Staff: One
- www.michigan.gov/mdot

In the early 1990s, MDOT initiated a shift in their overall business strategy—effectively creating a road map for employees—including making employee excellence and recognition key signs on the road to success, and **promoting and communicating recognition on a world-class scale.**

"In order to be prepared [for business challenges], our workforce must know how to effectively work in teams, and individuals must be empowered to get the work done more quickly and efficiently," explains Jan Seeger, who oversees

MDOT's recognition efforts. "Through these efforts we can recognize our employees for their creativity, working above and beyond...and providing outstanding customer service while living our values each day."

The expanded recognition efforts over a decade are noticed by MDOT people. "Thanks get expressed everyday," notes employee Julie Heiss. Marlyn Stroud states, "I have worked in three other state agencies; never before have I received recognition for work done [as at MDOT]."

MDOT's Recognition Objectives

For recognition to be effective, it should follow these basic fundamentals:

- Be consistent with and reinforce department values and goals
- Highlight effective teamwork
- Recognize improvement and outstanding achievement whenever it happens
- Combine formal and informal methods of recognition
- Be delivered in a personal and honest manner
- Be timely
- Be simple and user-friendly
- Be flexible and fresh—be willing to make changes
- Ask for employee input

Determining the Route Markers *Management Responsibility*

When a 1993 employee satisfaction survey showed that MDOT employees wanted to feel more valued and appreciated for their work, department employees working with MDOT management support,

created an Employee Recognition Team (ERT), as part of the Performance Excellence Division (PED).

Like many public sector organizations, MDOT sees its share of management shifts. The department is managed by a director. In 1996, Director Bob Welke, further paved the way for the ERT's success by telling MDOT's senior leaders, "You all need to let your staff members know how much you appreciate what they have done. You need to recognize them and to celebrate with them. You do not need to ask for my approval or direction, you just need to do it and do it now."

That directive continues to shape MDOT's recognition efforts ten years and three directors later under Director Gloria Jeff who regularly encourages MDOT employees to "celebrate success."

Senior management gives the ERT the freedom, time, and budget to encourage recognition efforts throughout the organization.

"[The ERT] is a cross-functional team of employees represented by various classifications and state wide work areas on the team," says Seeger. "They meet monthly to discuss reward and recognition issues and create and implement programs."

Clear Maps for Successful Journeys *Communication Plan*

Communication is key to recognition success—whether educating about the programs and logistics, or announcing and cheering for accomplishments. "Keeping employees informed about recognition programs is a critical component," notes Jan Seeger. "Information should be readily accessible and timely."

Electronic & Visual Communications

MDOT's employees are spread across the state of Michigan. Some are in desk jobs with constant access to email and online communications, others are on the road and use a computer less often, but all have regular online access. This is important, because communication materials often refer employees to MDOT's recognition pages on their intranet for more information.

"Obviously, it took some time for all employees to have accessibility to a computer," Seeger recalls. "But now we use our weekly *Monday Memo* online newsletter to tell about reward and recognition programs and link to the Performance Excellence website to get the details."

In addition to electronic notices, MDOT excels with a huge variety of communication tools—all reinforcing the organization's values while encouraging people to utilize the formal and informal recognition programs.

Creating an Image



"We have a fantastic Graphics Unit!" Jan Seeger says. "Their support has been tremendous. The program administrator works with their staff on each of the programs. They developed the concept of 'ribbon characters.' Then we fine tuned the characters to suit the individual programs. In some situations (such as our brochures), we provided the wording and they developed the design. They are state employees and are professionals hired to do this type of work for transportation programs. We are fortunate to have access to such a talented staff."



Could You Do This???

“Other organizations can duplicate our success,” Seeger says. She notes that representatives from MDOT’s Employee Recognition Team are happy to talk with other organizations and share their knowledge. “The biggest hurdle is sponsorship and support. That has to be at the top of an organization.” Luckily for Seeger and her team—and for the employees of MDOT—support goes beyond their director all the way to the governor’s office.

But what if you don’t already have buy in from the top? Seeger suggests you try to meet with top management to “outline the values of reward and recognition for employees, and discuss the importance of their support. Be prepared to back-up what you present. The result is a WIN-WIN for both sides.”

The organization frequently uses posters to get the message out. Clear, concise posters are an effective way to reach field workers, who traditionally rely heavily on “bulletin board” communications.

Additionally, the ERT spreads messages about recognition through the printed materials such as flyers, the quarterly magazine *MDOT Today*, and when appropriate, letters from the director.

MDOT created a clear and simple brochure called *50 Ways to Value MDOT Employees*, which includes clear information about recognition, and many valuable tips on recognition.

Verbal Communication

“When we launch a new program, we do a kick-off in our main office,” Seeger explains. While all areas receive written materials such as a cover letter, brochures, Web site information, and applications to assist in implementing the program, they also receive the name and telephone number of the program administrator.

“At the lobby kick-off, our top executives and members of the ERT eagerly attend so they, too, can ‘walk the talk’ and support the program,” Jan notes. The program administrator is available to visit work areas to share the information and answer questions. Additionally, the Employee Recognition Team members are available to present the latest program information during staff meetings, etc.

Reaching the Destination *Conclusion*

MDOT measures the success of their recognition program by monitoring participation. The results continue to be excellent, showing that their program communications are effective in getting the word out.

When a small handful of MDOT employees were asked about how frequently they notice recognition communications, their answers—“several times a month,” “they are posted throughout our office, so every day,” “about once a week”—demonstrate that the signs are posted, and the employees know what they’re supposed to do for a successful journey.

Seeger points out that no communications tool works on its own—it is the dedication of people managing and using the tools that make the programs really zing!

<p align="center">Michigan Department of Transportation What makes MDOT best in this area</p>	<p align="center">How your organization can duplicate this</p>
<p>Standard 4: Recognition Program Communication Plan</p> <p>MDOT's Employee Recognition Team has developed communications that clearly match the organization's goals.</p> <p>MDOT has a very clear image for their program, which effectively "brands" the program. The "ribbon characters" are easily identifiable as MDOT Recognition.</p> <p>Weekly inclusion of recognition elements in the company's e-newsletter <i>Monday Memo</i> keeps recognition high on employee radar.</p> <p>MDOT uses a variety of communication tools to reach a geographically broad and diverse group of employees. Their posters, brochures, e-news, and messages are all clear and to the point.</p>	<p>Know your organization's values and goals, and make sure they are reflected in all communication materials.</p> <p>Talk with people in your marketing department—ask for their help in developing effective communications and branding your program. Chances are, people there will have all sorts of ideas and be willing to help.</p> <p>Look at a variety of ways to reach your employees—use electronic and print.</p> <p>Take advantage of your organization's intranet to create a recognition site—and make sure all other materials refer people to that site so it becomes <i>the</i> resource for recognition information.</p> <p>Make sure your printed materials are in a variety of formats—brochure and "small" size that you can easily send or hand to someone, and "large" format, such as posters, that you can use on bulletin boards and places where people will see it in passing.</p>

C R E D I T S

Best Practices Development Team 1999-2000

Dee Hansford, Team Lead Dee Hansford Consulting	Fred Hibben Sears	Bob Voyles BI Performance Services
Vern Blackford Caterpillar, Inc.	Kimberly Smithson CultureWorx, Inc.	Barbara Ruddy, Arizona Dept. of Economic Security
Greg Boswell O.C. Tanner Co.	Bob Nelson Nelson Motivation, Inc.	
Patrick Dailey Nokia, Inc.	Debbie Patrick Walt Disney World Co.	

Best Practices Implementation Team 2001-2002

Theresa Chambers, Team Lead City of Seattle	Theresa Harkins Delta Airlines	Bret Wilson City of Bellevue, WA
Denise Grandi Mission Federal Credit Union	Dinah Day King County Solid Waste, WA	Christing Lubarski CultureWorx, Inc.

Best Practices Selection Committee 2002

Theresa Chambers, Chair City of Seattle	Denise Grandi Mission Federal Credit Union	Bret Wilson City of Bellevue, WA
Dinah Day King County Solid Waste, WA	Fred McCarthy, PhD St. Benedict School	Vince Alonzo <i>Successful Meetings Magazine</i>
Ramesh Narasimhan Quick Chek Food Stores		

Best Practices Committee 2004

Theresa Chambers, Chair City of Seattle	Robert Chovenac, Co-chair Warner, Norcross & Judd LLP
Chester Elton, Judge O.C. Tanner	Rita Maehling, Judge Achieve Consulting
Barbara Glanz, Judge Barbara Glanz Communications	Bob Nelson, PhD, Judge Nelson Motivation

Best Practices Program Sponsor 2002 & 2004: Baudville

2004 Best Practices Summary Report Written & Prepared by

Randall Shirley, Creative2Go.com