

A quarterly publication service  
produced by  
LIVE Consultants Inc.

April 2002  
Number 104



# Recognition

---

## From the Editor

“People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.” This eloquent insight was offered by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, one of the pioneers in helping us understand what happens when we face a substantial loss in our lives.

Yes, it is easy to look good when times are good. The real test for us as individuals — and I would argue for teams and organizations as well — is what happens to us in tough times. Do we have the same ability to shine?

At LIVE Consultants, we help individuals, teams, and organizations understand their strengths and capacities so that, no matter what the environmental challenges may be, they can shine and do well.

For further information about LIVE Consultants and the work we do with organizations, go to our website: [www.liveconsultants.com](http://www.liveconsultants.com).

*Marilyn Baetz, editor*

## About the Author and the Article

Recognition and reward programs appear to be a growth industry these days. Every organization seems to have some program to signal employees that their contribution is valued. Mugs, hats, jackets, jerseys, pens, clocks, and crystal are given out at seemingly every opportunity. And in some ways, that’s not all bad.

In this article, Stephen declares that all of us as individuals seek recognition; it is just not the behaviour of the emotionally needy. He then points to a number of straightforward ways to recognize the contribution of others.

Stephen is a partner in LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization that sponsors this publication.



*Stephen Baetz*

# Recognizing Recognition

---

Ready for a quiz?

Good. Here goes. What do the words laser, snafu, and NATO have in common?

Give up?

They're acronyms. Laser stands for light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation. Snafu? Situation normal, all fouled up. And of course NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Acronyms are those nifty short-forms that we use daily, if not hourly, so we can ... well, what is the completion to that sentence? So we can be more efficient? So we can communicate more clearly? So we can identify who is in the know and who is not? Your guess is as good as mine. All I do know is that every organization has them and uses them.

I rather suspect too that there are some people who, with Dilbert-esque delight, invent them and then keep track of how long it takes before they hear their new invention come back to them in conversation. Some organizations — fearing a Tower of Babel world where everyone talks but nobody understands — have issued AHs to new employees of all the known acronyms in use. AH? Acronym Handbook.

Which brings me to a discussion I had a couple of weeks ago when a VP of HR said to me, "We've got to do a lot more R&R around here."

Rest and relaxation, I thought; is this his effort to create a better work-life balance for the members of his organization? Nope. R&R as I listened more meant rewards and recognition. And doggone it if I didn't hear and read about R&R at least 5 or 6 times in the next several days ... and each time it meant rewards and recognition. Such, I suppose, is the danger of an acronym ... they can be homonyms.

All that aside, I began to do some thinking about rewards and recognition. I should be more precise. I found myself re-evaluating the mental model I had about rewards and recognition and found it a bit wanting.

My premise has been that the need for recognition (as distinct from the encouragement that might be offered through praise) was something that was needed by

individuals who are insecure, who don't have a well-formed image of themselves and the capabilities that they have. When I took the time to test that point of view, however, it didn't hold water.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has recognition just above basic and security needs and just below achievement and self-actualization. And although I may want to dismiss his work as nice theory but highly impractical, I do have to admit that lots of people who have a solid self-image and well-rooted confidence can trace their growth and development using his model. In fact they would declare that they *continue* to find ways to be recognized and valued. Added to that, I've seen salespeople move mountains to win the trip: not because the trip itself was significant but because being on the list and being recognized as part of an exceptional group was so important. I've seen arguments erupt about who has won the Employee of the Month parking spot — not because the spot saved the person innumerable steps into the office but because the spot was a symbol of contribution. I've watched managers go to the effort of having energetic, daily team huddles on a retail sales floor so they could earn the distinction of meeting and exceeding customer service standards. I've observed technical professionals invest endless hours crafting elegant solutions. No doubt that one of the reasons they would do that was for the thrill of solving the problem; the other reason is the recognition they receive from colleagues who recognize how lean, efficient, and powerful the solution is. I've seen senior executives pull their organizations through knotholes so they can be recognized as "best of breed" or a global leader. Athletes put themselves through remarkable pain for moments on the podium; performers deal with the anxiety of exposure for the applause and the curtain call.

Are these merely the behaviours of the psychologically insecure? I suspect not. The evidence is compelling: most of us, if not all of us, find ways to put ourselves in the spotlight where we can feel the warm adulation of others, where we can feel valued for the contributions we are making, where we can feel

appreciated by others, where we can feel like we belong.

That being the case, I needed to surrender my old mental model and embrace a new one — recognition is a need that I ought to understand. No that's not going far enough — recognition is a need that I ought to understand and respond to.

The usual push-back that I've heard from managers and leaders is that they don't have control over recognition programs — it's controlled by HR who wants either consistent application of any plan to ensure equity or by senior management who wants to control costs.

I suppose that's true if you are looking for some comprehensive plan, some big splash, some huge statement from the organization. However, I believe that there are a number of simple actions that can be taken to recognize the contribution of others; note that I've said "others" and not "the people we lead." I'm sure you get the point: these suggestions are useable with all our co-workers whether they be our immediate manager, our peers, or the people we lead. When I say simple actions I am referring to small, relatively inexpensive, yet significant gestures.

Try these out. Some are appropriate for individuals and some are appropriate for teams.

#### For Individuals ...

- ✓ Write a letter of appreciation and put a copy in the person's file: discuss it again when coaching or doing a performance review.
- ✓ Ask senior management to write a letter of recognition; ask them to hand deliver it.
- ✓ Give time off ... a day or partial day.
- ✓ Go to lunch and pay for dessert.
- ✓ Take a longer lunch with the person.
- ✓ Tell the rest of the team about that person's success.
- ✓ Send an e-mail to acknowledge the person's contribution ... put it in their file.
- ✓ Provide additional learning opportunities.
- ✓ Publish a "Job Well Done" column in a newsletter.

- ✓ Post a letter of appreciation on the Intranet site.
- ✓ Provide an additional challenge which uses and expands the person's skills.
- ✓ Buy a copy of a magazine or journal that covers interests the person has.
- ✓ Write a card and attach a box of Smarties for a particularly brilliant contribution.

#### For Teams ...

- ✓ Go to a movie mid-afternoon.
- ✓ Bring in a mid-afternoon dessert.
- ✓ Create bulletin board announcements noting the valuable contribution of the team ... post them throughout the organization.
- ✓ Declare a casual day.
- ✓ Increase the team exposure to senior management by asking the team to do a presentation for them.
- ✓ Provide tickets to a sporting, musical, or cultural event.
- ✓ Create a Hall of Fame on your office or cubicle wall.
- ✓ Post the letter you sent to senior management commending the team.

You're right; this is not a complete list by any means. However, the point should be clear — there are numerous actions that you can take to signal that you recognize and value what others have done.

Whatever you choose to do, make sure it is something that is valued by the person on the receiving end. Going to lunch may not be valued by a person on a diet ... leaving early at the end of the day may not be valued by a person who gets a ride from somebody else ... going to a movie in the middle of the day may not be valued by a team that is feeling swamped ... you know where I'm headed. Any recognition that is given should be valued by the person or the team on the receiving end and not driven by what is convenient or easy for you to do.

Here's an entry that I'm sure appears in the AH of the most respected leaders: Provide R&R for a JWD as well as for snafus that have been avoided.

# Reading Lists

More and more individuals are taking responsibility for their own learning and development, understanding that this will help to ensure their lifetime employability. To help you in that pursuit, you may want to go to our website — [www.liveconsultants.com](http://www.liveconsultants.com) — and click on *Resources*. That will take you to a section of the site where you will find reading lists in areas like:

- ❖ Change
- ❖ Strategy
- ❖ Employee Engagement
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Teams
- ❖ Employee Development

We've purposefully chosen what we feel are the best articles and books on the subject.

And who knows, while you're at the site you may find other materials that will help your learning and development.

**For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.**