GROWERTALKS

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The Unexpected Benefits of Employee Appreciation

Neal Glatt



In every nursery, greenhouse and garden center, there are employees who quietly wonder if anyone notices the effort they put in each day. They show up early during spring rush, stay late to finish tagging or watering, calm frustrated customers or solve inventory issues on the fly, only to often go home without hearing a single word about it. Over time, that silence sends a message that quality work isn't really good enough.

Only four in 10 employees strongly agree that they've received recognition or praise for doing work in the last seven days. In many organizations, it's common to find between one-fifth and one-third of employees saying their best efforts are routinely ignored. For employees, the lack of appreciation experienced becomes a primary driver of disengagement and turnover.

Individuals who receive recognition and praise increase their productivity, boost engagement among colleagues, are more likely to stay with their organization and often contribute to higher customer satisfaction scores. Employees who aren't adequately recognized are twice as likely to say they'll quit within the next year. In a seasonal industry where turnover already disrupts operations, appreciation can be used as a lever to outperform the average experience.

Practicing recognition

Recognition works because it helps employees see their value and communicates what's important to clarify expectations. When someone is thanked specifically for staying late to reorganize a perennial bench so customers can shop more easily, the message is clear that presentation standards matter. When a grower is recognized for catching an irrigation issue before crop damage occurs, the message reinforces values of vigilance and ownership.

Great managers understand that recognition isn't about flattery or handing out generic compliments. It must be authentic, meaningful and motivating. Authentic appreciation feels genuine and heartfelt, highlights the value of the work and the person doing it, and connects to what matters most to the individual. That means "Good job!" isn't enough for managerial praise. Something like, "I appreciate the way you walked that customer through plant options

and soil amendments to turn a return into a sale and that's exactly the kind of customer service that builds loyalty," carries far more weight.

In busy operations, recognition often falls victim to time pressure. Managers assume people know they're doing well. But employees don't experience assumptions, they experience what's said and what isn't. Leaders must regularly ask themselves practical questions to keep appreciation front and center. Are employees praised for their efforts? Has an environment been created where peers recognize one another? Does each employee receive recognition in the way they prefer? Is team success celebrated intentionally or only when something goes wrong?

Implementation of recognition can be done quickly and easily. Start by making recognition a standing agenda item in weekly staff meetings or huddles, not as a rushed afterthought, but as a deliberate moment to call out specific behaviors tied to standards. Or encourage department leads to bring one example each week of someone who went above and beyond to be shared publicly. Praise individuals for doing good work and recognize employees for achieving their goals.

Consider how that might look during peak spring season. An associate who reorganizes a high-traffic annual display to reduce congestion should hear that it improved customer flow and sales conversion. A team member who consistently treats customers with patience during long lines should be recognized not just for speed, but for representing the brand well under pressure. An employee who maintains meticulous labeling accuracy should be acknowledged because it prevents costly downstream mistakes.

Recognition also becomes more powerful when individualized. Some employees appreciate public praise in front of the team, others prefer a quiet word in the office and some value handwritten notes. The best managers personalize their approach by asking their people: How does each person like to receive recognition? What was the best recognition they've received in the past six months? From whom would they most value recognition?

Another overlooked tactic is encouraging peer recognition. In garden centers especially, teamwork across departments is constant. Cashiers depend on plant knowledge from the floor staff. Growers rely on shipping and inventory teams. When employees are encouraged to acknowledge each other's help, recognition multiplies beyond what any single manager can deliver. A simple practice is inviting team members at weekly meetings to thank a colleague who made their job easier that week.

Recognition also protects against one of the most damaging dynamics in operations-heavy environments: only hearing from leadership when something goes wrong. If the only conversations that happen are corrective, even strong performers start to disengage. Managers can never give too much recognition if it's honest and deserved. When positive feedback becomes routine, corrective feedback feels balanced rather than punitive.
The key is consistency. Recognition loses impact when it's saved for annual reviews or big milestones. In fast-paced horticulture operations, a week can feel like a season. If employees can't recall recent appreciation in the last seven days, motivation fades quickly.

For owners and managers looking to improve performance without adding new programs or increasing payroll, recognition is one of the most cost-effective tools available. It requires attention more than budget. It demands specificity more than speeches. And it produces returns in productivity, retention and customer experience.

Employees want to know their work matters. In an industry built on nurturing growth, that principle applies just as much to people as it does to plants. When recognition becomes intentional, frequent and authentic, teams begin to

see their value more clearly and businesses see the results in stronger performance season after season. **GT**

Neal Glatt is a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach and leadership consultant who partners with landscaping and horticulture businesses to drive growth through engaged teams and stronger sales. Learn more or book a call at NealGlatt.com.