Maximising Your Post-Awards Success

BECHER TOWNSHEND, MANAGING DIRECTOR
Beyond PR

These days, there seems to be an award for everything, and a quick look at the award opportunities for Local Government show some excellent avenues to improve your reputation and reinforce to the public and your competitors that you are at the top of your game.

Tasmania is all about reputation and winning an award helps build your reputation. With a little publicity, you can use your awards to consolidate your recognition, get the message out there and show everyone that you mean business.

However, these awards don’t just celebrate and recognise Local Government projects that showcase best practice, innovation and excellence. They also offer your council a chance to pass on knowledge and expertise to other councils, not just across Tasmania, but across the country, taking your reputation along for the ride.

The first step is choosing the right awards to win. Filling in award applications can be a costly and time consuming venture and, if you spread your talent too thinly, may offer little return. A half-baked award application is a waste of time - time that could be better spent improving your business. So don’t even bother playing unless you are playing to win.

Entering awards that you have no chance of winning could even damage your reputation because no one wants to be known as the constant runner-up. If you are repeatedly unsuccessful, find out why. Talk to the winners, find out their story and use this feedback to strengthen future award applications.

When you do win that elusive award, tell people about it. Word of mouth is a great way to communicate information in the public sphere but it is up to you to get the message out there at the start. Get a well-written press release out to the media as soon as possible. Good news is still news, so get your local media to work for you and don’t forget to mention your award in your next council newsletter.

Displaying your awards in your place of business is great promotion, for both your clients and your staff. Having an award on display can also increase staff morale. And on that note, the most important people to thank when you win an award are your staff. They deserve the recognition just as much as you do and your staff are the best advertisement for your business, so don’t underestimate the value of publicising your success internally.

You don’t win an award every day, so make the most of this opportunity to celebrate and capitalise on your success. There are many good reasons for blowing your own trumpet and making sure the right messages about your success get through to the right people. Just make sure you get it right.

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Are You Dead on the Job?

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There’s a story doing the rounds at the moment about the worker who was dead at his desk for five days before anyone discovered him.

The story goes like this: “Bosses of a publishing firm are trying to work out why no one noticed that one of their employees had been sitting dead at his desk for five days before anyone asked if he was feeling okay. George Turklebaum, 51, who had been employed as a proof-reader at a New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open-plan office he shared with 23 other workers. He quietly passed away on Monday, but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked why he was still working during the weekend.

His boss, Elliot Wachiaski, said: “George was always the first guy in each morning and the last to leave at night, so no one found it unusual that he was in the same position all that time and didn’t say anything. He was always absorbed in his work and kept much to himself. A post-mortem examination revealed that he had been dead for five days after suffering a coronary. Ironically, George was proofreading manuscripts of medical textbooks when he died.”

True or not, there is an important message in this yarn. Have you been appreciated at work lately? Whilst pondering this question, keep in mind that appreciation is a two way street – we also need to appreciate the work of others. We all want to be associated with a worthwhile, winning organisation. Our greatest reward is receiving acknowledgment that we have contributed to making something meaningful happen. More than anything else, people want to be valued for a job well done by those they hold in high regard.

A famous study by Lawrence Lindahl in the 1940’s came up with some surprising results when supervisors and their employees were asked to list “What motivates employees?” Employees listed “appreciation of a job well done” as number one and “feeling in on things” as number two. Supervisors, on the other hand, expected the employees would rank these two items as eighth and tenth respectively (supervisors thought employees would put “wages” as number one and “promotion” as number two). These results have been replicated time and time again ever since. In a recent study, employees were asked to rank job-based incentives. “Personal thank yous” came first and “a note of appreciation from my manager” came second. “Money” came in at 16th!

Praise, the thing that motivates us the most, takes so little time and costs nothing. Famous management writer Rosabeth Moss Kantor once said, “Compensation is a right. Recognition is a gift.” Have you appreciated the work of others lately? Has the value of your own work been appreciated? Here’s a quick test. Over the last week, have you done any of the following?

• Told someone they have done a good job?
• Looked specifically to find someone doing something well?
• Made someone else look good rather than taking the credit yourself?
• Thanked others for your own success?
• Passed on positive comments you have heard about others?

These are simple examples of the things we need to do regularly to acknowledge the good work of others.

You might say, “If it’s that easy, why don’t more people do it?” There are many reasons, but they all fall into two categories – personal and organisational. On a personal level, many of us are not comfortable giving praise. We may be awkward about it, or perhaps believe that people are paid to do a job, so why do we have to praise them? From an organisational perspective, it may be the culture that is holding us back, or perhaps technology preventing us from valuing the work of others. For example, technology has changed the way many of us operate. Email may have replaced personal interaction, so we no longer see what others do well. Out of sight is out of mind, so how can we praise good work if we don’t see it?

Here are six ways we can put praise for a job well done back into our working lives.

1. Look for things people do well and acknowledge them for their good work.
2. Be a model of acknowledgment – show others it’s OK to give praise.
3. Have a conversation with a colleague about how to give praise for work well done.
4. When people have performed above the norm, write them a small thank you note (not email).
5. Encourage others to thank one another and pass on stories of good work to your manager.
6. Work to create a culture of appreciation – make acknowledgment part of your daily routine.

The essential point is that praise must be frequent and given locally (by colleagues and managers). It should not be seen as a corporate initiative or program, but merely “the way we do things around here”. What’s not been said so far, is that praise must be genuine. People in general are very good at spotting insincerity. The message? When you do praise someone, make sure it’s for the good work they have done and not just for the sake of it. A final word of warning…many organisations turn acknowledgment into an event. They distort it with extrinsic motivators (such as money) and taint it with internal competition. Giving praise for a job well done is just that – pure and simple.

So, find someone doing something good today and simply tell them what a good job they’ve done. Above all, tap people on the shoulder occasionally to make sure they are still alive.

Bob Selden is Author of the book, What to Do When You Become the Boss - a practical guide for managers. For further information, visit www.nationallearning.com.au.

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