

# The Power of Peer-to-Peer

**Grow your culture of recognition from the ground up.**

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Peer-to-peer recognition is a key component of a comprehensive recognition strategy. Take a look at all of the “likes” on Facebook and you’ll see just how hungry we are for the approval of our peers ... and how much we enjoy both receiving — and giving — compliments.

Of course, a well-designed peer-to-peer initiative does more than create a collection of “You are so good at what you do” posts.

A whole lot more.

By offering your employees a formal system through which they can recognize their colleagues for good work, you’ll sustain your culture of recognition through the years, generating employee behavior change, satisfaction and engagement.

## **The neurobiology of recognition**

It’s not rocket science – but it’s powerful, neurobiological science and it will help you understand why peer-to-peer recognition works.

Every time one of us succeeds at something — anything — our nerve cells release a chemical called dopamine, which stimulates the reward center of our brain.

Rodd Wagner, *New York Times* bestselling author, writes about this “primal surge” in his new book, *Widgets: The 12 New Rules for Managing Your Employees As If They’re Real People*.

“Dopamine not only surges when someone succeeds but also when his leaders and colleagues acknowledge his success. Because our ancestors survived better working together than fending for themselves, we are social creatures eager to be applauded for our work, whether by chants at the campfire or likes on Facebook. Recognition can release as much or more dopamine as the act that earned it.”

## **What goes around comes around...**

When an employee is recognized by a peer, he or she is likely to repeat the behavior that earned the recognition. Why? Because it produces a double-dopamine rush: Doing the behavior feels great — and being recognized for it does too.

“Those who anticipate recognition for their future successes feel a greater obligation to work hard, give a higher proportion of their full effort, look for ways to improve the way they do their work and deliver more of their best ideas to the company,” writes Wagner.

A company-wide peer-to-peer program can increase your employees’ anticipation of recognition because recognition occurs frequently. In our research, we’ve found the anticipation of being recognized paired with being recognized often drives repetition of desired behaviors and highly engaged employees.

What’s more, the most effective recognition is timely. A company-wide peer-to-peer initiative leads to weekly or even daily acknowledgement — which means that recognition is not a single event happening once a year but an everyday part of your company culture.

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## **How to make it a success**

Peer-to-peer recognition can be as powerfully simple as the science that makes it work. The easier and more fun it is, the better.

- **Involve your employees:** Your employees are a great resource when it comes to designing and implementing your peer-to-peer recognition plan. Ask for their input on how it should be structured and delivered. After all, they know best which behaviors and achievements make a difference in the jobs they do every day. Plus, they can advise on how best to achieve the greatest possible participation. Encouraging your employees to own the peer-to-peer initiative will help guarantee its success.
- **Involve your managers:** Managerial buy-in is equally important. Your managers' willingness to support, showcase and celebrate your peer-to-peer initiative is invaluable. Make sure they talk it up in meetings, share the best submissions and otherwise motivate their teams to participate.
- **Keep it simple:** Ease of participation is vital. Whether you use paper recognition cards or create an online system, make sure the rules are clear and the act of recognizing someone is quick and engaging. Ideally, you should make your system accessible so your employees can participate anytime, anywhere. Think about linking it to social media or incorporating social behaviors, which will increase its popularity and visibility.
- **Make it matter:** Tie your peer-to-peer initiative into your company mission and values. Make sure participants articulate the "why and how" of the recognition being given: How did the recipient help his or her teammates, the company, the customers? How did the behavior reflect and support the larger mission of the company or team? For maximum impact, translate the recognized behaviors into best practices that can benefit everyone.
- **Check it:** Once your peer-to-peer initiative is underway, send out a quick survey to see how it's being received. If there are concerns, address them right away.
- **Keep it fresh and fun:** Think about giving awards for things like most recognitions earned, most frequent participant and top reason for recognition. To boost participation, try a monthly drawing or perhaps a team award for reaching a participation milestone.
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate:** Promote your initiative regularly and share the reasons for which people are recognized. The recognition submissions can define and drive a standard of performance for all to emulate.

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## Think big

Rodd Wagner shares two telling statistics in *Widgets*:

“Only one in four Americans is confident without reservation that if he or she does good work, it will be recognized.”

“Those who are least confident in future recognition are 17 times as likely to be thinking of leaving as those most confident that hard work will be matched with strong praise.”

Wagner’s ninth New Rule of Engagement, “Magnify their success,” suggests how companies can improve statistic #1 and avoid the dire consequences of #2. He writes: “What a company does not recognize, it should not expect to see repeated.”

—— The takeaway?

### **Make a big deal of your employees’ accomplishments to ensure that the victories will be multiplied.**

Implementing a peer-to-peer recognition plan allows for large-scale celebrations of employee accomplishments, leading to even larger-scale victories: increased trust, camaraderie, loyalty, motivation ... and highly engaged employees.

To learn more about BI WORLDWIDE’s social recognition system, G5, and how it can help build a culture of recognition in your organization, visit: [BIWORLDWIDE.com](http://BIWORLDWIDE.com) or email [Latam@BIWORLDWIDE.com](mailto:Latam@BIWORLDWIDE.com).

