



On rewards, awards, and recognition...*our leaders say*

At Texas Cooperative Extension and the Prairie View Cooperative Extension Program, we are committed to our employees and to workforce development. As you know, several initiatives have been aimed at increasing employee capability and retaining our best performers.

These initiatives -- revision of the performance appraisal structure, the masters degree requirement for agents, development and implementation of career ladders, and development of the competency model to guide employee development -- along with the input of groups like the Spirit Committee and the Professional Development Trust, are positioning Texas Extension for the future with a workforce that can meet any challenge.

Organizations that appear on lists such as Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" often cite employee recognition programs as one of the keys to a motivated and productive workforce. Texas Extension is committed to building a culture that recognizes and rewards employees for their efforts. We look forward to the enthusiasm and creativity that each of you offer to help achieve this goal. Enclosed is information and resources to help you begin your work towards this goal.

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On rewards, awards, and recognition...research says

Supervisors are constantly trying to manage programs, their offices, employees, and the million projects and responsibilities on their plate. With all of the deadlines they face, some of the seemingly less meaningful tasks are pushed to wayside. However, some of those less important “tasks” are actually integral to the success of Extension as a whole.

One of those “tasks” is actually an attitude – an attitude of appreciation for those employees for whom the supervisor is responsible. Much effort is given to recruiting new and talented hires, but little is done to make sure that these valuable assets stick around. Branch (2000) asserts that in the corporate world today, retention does not mean keeping every single employee; however, it does mean that supervisors cannot take valuable employees for granted.

Many supervisors have a tendency to think that employees only want to be compensated monetarily. Actually, a survey by Goodrich and Sherwood (1999) found that employees value responsibility and autonomy, the respect and recognition of superiors, and the opportunity to have ideas adopted more than money and bonuses. Dickey (1998) agrees that employees need more than monetary rewards and suggests that “what tends to motivate them [employees] to perform is the thoughtful, personal kind of recognition that comes from true appreciation for a job well done – a good old pat on the back” (p. 1). Rewarding an employee may not have a deadline or a meeting time attached to it, but showing appreciation to dedicated employees is an absolute priority for Extension supervisors.

With the tight budget constraints in Extension, employees cannot always be rewarded with increased salaries. Therefore, supervisors must find more creative ways of rewarding and encouraging employees. Vinocur (1999) suggests finding small ways to show employees that they are a valuable asset to the organization, such as arranging for an annual lawn care or house cleaning. Firey (2001) mentions small rewards such as movie gift certificates, breakfast for the office, or personal thank-you notes as ways to increase employee moral and productivity.

Employees need to know that they are a valuable asset to the organization and that their work is important to the mission of Extension. Personnel no longer work their entire lives in the same office; contemporary trends lean toward professionals experiencing several careers (not just jobs) within their lifetime. Branch (2000) describes the evolution of employees from loyalty to commitment: loyalty was to the company itself, and commitment is to a project, supervisor, or team. In order for Extension to keep committed employees on board, supervisors much encourage, challenge, and reward them for their hard work.

Talented, dedicated employees are the lifeblood of Extension. It is up to their supervisors to make sure they continue “to provide quality, relevant outreach and continuing education programs and services to the people of Texas” (Mission of Extension). One challenge involving that responsibility is adequate compensation and rewards for these employees. With the limited resources available, this may seem like a daunting task. However, with some creativity and a little effort, recognizing the work of employees will be a high yield investment.

*“Remember the difference between a boss and a leader: a boss says ‘Go!’ - a leader says ‘Let’s go!’”
--E.M. Kelly*

On rewards, awards, and recognition...*the Spirit Committee says*

Employees who know they are valued are more productive, have a higher level of job satisfaction, and are less likely to leave the organization. Because Extension's employees are quite literally our greatest investment and our greatest asset, it is critically important that we establish an atmosphere in which employees know they are valued. This requires Extension to create a culture of mutual respect, reward, and recognition for employees at all levels.

Strategies Suggested by the Spirit Committee:

- Train and motivate supervisors to provide positive feedback to employees formally (constructive performance appraisal) and informally (e-mails, letters, phone calls, "pats on the back").
- Establish the understanding that taking time out of the office to participate in community organizations and service projects that are important to the employee is not only acceptable but valuable for developing the employee's professional network and positive visibility for Extension. Consider establishing a mechanism to recognize employees for community involvement other than Extension work.
- Reward tenure (longevity or length-of-service) with gift certificates for dinner for two and, for longer service, family trips to Texas vacation spots, in addition to pins and certificates.
- Expand rewards for performance and achievement to include more creative options, perhaps allowing employees to choose from several possibilities. Award ideas include: professionally relevant books, books-on-tape, or videos; savings bonds; family trips; \$100 allowance from the Extension budget to spend on an innovative idea or process related to their job; subscriptions to professional magazines; health club memberships.
- Spread recognition throughout the organization, including secretaries and other support staff, volunteers, and student workers.
 - Encourage employees to promote each other's accomplishments by giving the nominators recognition or small rewards as well.
 - Recognize, share, and celebrate collective and organizational accomplishments that belong to all of us (ex: the 4-H million-kid milestone).
 - Create less-formal opportunities for recognition, which don't require application or nominations, at the county, district, and state levels.
 - Create an award system based on recognizing employees for exemplifying Extension's organizational values. It could be called the "Spirit of Extension." These awards would be available to any employee at any level.
- Develop internal newsletter and/or web site to celebrate employees' personal milestones (birthday, work anniversary, sympathy cards/flowers, get well).
- Take the time to recognize people individually at conferences (for years of service, etc.) and make the recognition programs more fun, creative, memorable, and special.
- Create printed or electronic notes or postcards with messages such as "Wonderful!," "Bravo!," "Thanks a Million!" for employees to send to each other.
- Create a family orientation program, to welcome the families of new hires into Extension. Consider providing a welcoming gift to the employee's family with items to benefit the entire family.
- After a major time-consuming project, have supervisors and/or administrators send thank-you notes to the employee's family thanking them for their support of the employee and Extension.
- The "Spirit of Extension" is built on our organizational values and employee satisfaction, but the true deciding factor lies in you, the Extension employee.

The themes outlined by the Spirit Committee are just a beginning for creating the "Spirit of Extension." Every employee in Extension must take the time and make the effort to promote the Extension Spirit. A committee can make recommendations – as we have done here – but it is up to each of us to make change happen.

*"Good words are worth much, and cost little."
-George Herbert*

On rewards, awards, and recognition...*the Professional Development Trust says*

The Professional Development Trust organized a workgroup to address supervisor development based on the recommendation of the Spirit Committee. That Trust workgroup identified the following guiding principles for supervisor development:

1. Extension supervisors build people
 - They communicate effectively
 - They inspire trust
 - They recognize and reward performance
 - They coach rather than boss
 - They reward team performance
 - They foster loyalty in team members
 - They value differences among individuals
2. Extension supervisors ride for the brand
 - They protect organizational integrity
 - They maximize human and material resources
 - They are responsive to supervision
3. Extension supervisors focus on the mission
 - They demonstrate accountability
 - They live the mission personally
 - They champion change
 - They incorporate diversity
4. Extension supervisors are educational leaders
 - They provide direction
 - They set priorities
 - They establish a positive tone
 - They establish mechanisms and environments that foster innovation, creativity and change
5. Extension supervisors are committed to continuous improvement

Based on these guiding principles and directed the Extension Competency model the following supervisor competencies were identified by the Trust workgroup:

- Subject matter expertise: building human capacity, program leadership, solve problems
- Organizational effectiveness: build relationships, organizational savvy, cultural competency, resources, accountability, organizational integrity
- Develop and involve others: delegate, coach, teamwork, trust, reward recognition, loyalty, differences
- Communications: spoken, written, manage conflict, interpersonal; understand purpose, direction, priorities, environments
- Action Orientation: maintain focus, set and achieve goals, champion change, think conceptually, display vision and purpose, direction, priorities, environments
- Personal effectiveness: flexibility, self development, work effectively, positive tone, responsive to supervisor, mission, continuous improvement