

## **A Short History of Employee Recognition in America**

During the industrial age workers were seen as a cog in the industrial machine. In the assembly line system of manufacturing allowed management to teach workers one single task. There was no need to understand the entire manufacturing process or have a specific skill set that was a differentiator. Most workers could learn a single task quickly, such as attaching a bolt on an auto body chassis. If you lost an employee for any reason, you could simply plug in another worker, teach him the simple task on the line and continue the manufacturing process.

Union representation of workers eliminated some of the ruthlessness of this process. Factory floor workers began to be recognized for their tenure through the use of service awards. Recognition was used at management levels. It was elite and correlated with promotion opportunities within the organization. Recognition was a control mechanism

As we moved to the Dot Com era, the individual became cool – technology provided a path toward business creation, unlimited information and a new world view. For a while, recognition was passe', employees were mobile and looking for opportunity. It was also the beginning of turmoil for traditional-oriented workers who did not embrace technology and change. The stability and security they had sought became elusive. They weren't worried about being recognized, they were worried about their jobs!

In the present Era, we see the individual as a Brand. Successful workers have become more entrepreneurial even with the structure of corporations. The promise of long term employment has been replaced with the promise of training and support while employed. Today, performance offers choice to workers, both in terms of employers and the type of work-day contributions. And recognition is now viewed as validation of contributions and level of performance in the workplace.

Employers who are viewed as worker-friendly provide to individuals those benefits, perks, and services that the four generations of workers desire to make work mesh with personal life. Recognition is a powerful tool for management to connect with workers and drive engagement. Recognition of employees for specific contributions and performance helps connect employer's goals and with those activities employees perform every day leading to business results.

Employee recognition has become a critical part of the employee engagement process.