Recognizing Volunteers

We all need a pat on the back from time to time. Whether we call this recognition, appreciation or awards, we are recognizing the efforts and contributions of others.

One of our deepest emotional needs is for recognition and approval by other people. Satisfying this need is especially important when working with people in a leadership capacity.

Giving volunteers visible appreciation needs to include recognition of:

- The importance of the job.
- The quality of the performance.
- The person or group that performed the job.

This doesn’t mean pouring on praise when it’s not deserved. It does mean giving credit where credit is due.

Effective Recognition

In order for recognition to be most effective, it should be:

1. **Earned** – Recognition should be for significant accomplishments. Unearned recognition can be embarrassing to both the recipient and his/her group. Clearly state why the person is being recognized or what he/she did to deserve the award.

2. **Formal and Informal** – Formal recognition consists of certificates, ribbons, pins, etc., and is usually given in a public situation. Informal recognition is more spontaneous and is not usually planned in advance. However, it is just as important, and sometimes more so, than formal recognition. From time to time, we all need to receive such strokes as, “You really taught a good workshop,” “Gee, I’m glad you are here with these good ideas” or “Your committee is really getting things done.”

3. **A Part of the Total Club Program** – Plan recognition into the club program on an annual basis. Advance planning builds in opportunities to recognize personal contributions of 4-H parents, public supporters, project leaders, teen leaders and others.

**Evaluation as Recognition**

Evaluation can also be one form of recognition. Volunteers want to know how they’re doing. Discussions with volunteers not only help them to see their progress but also give them a chance to ask questions and make suggestions for the program.

Individual and group discussions with volunteers will help to:

- Identify training needs.
- Judge volunteer’s potential for new leadership roles.
Determine the extent to which youth and adults are achieving their goals.

Provide feedback on the success of the 4-H program in different situations.

**Ways to Recognize Volunteers**

Some ways you might recognize volunteers are:

- Give personal thanks or praise either on the spot or by telephone.
- Write a note of appreciation or praise.
- Encourage participation in team planning.
- Celebrate outstanding individual and/or group accomplishments.
- Have special recognition programs, parties, teas or other activities for parents, community supporters, project leaders, first-year 4-H members, officers or other contributors to the program.
- Recognize individuals in front of people who are important to them.
- Send invitations for special 4-H events such as the annual club achievement program, Christmas party or summer picnic.

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