



by David Elam

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Best of Times, Worst of Times

Reward and Recognition for Peak Performance

Although growth in the environmental industry slowed in 2009, our industry has done much better than others. *Environmental Business Journal* (Volume XXII, Number 7, 2009) forecasts environmental industry growth of 0.6% for 2009, reporting that this translates into roughly the same 3-point growth differential that the environmental industry has averaged over the economy since 2002. *Engineering News-Record* (August 3, 2009, pp. 28-38) reports that environmental firms working down backlog from 2008 are now facing the recession but are still planning for recovery.

If things are so great, then why do things seem so bad? In today's business climate, it can be hard to find team members with the enthusiasm for our projects, our companies, and our profession. Tempers flare unexpectedly. Coworkers that were once enthusiastic about taking on new assignments are conditional in their responses. What a team member may have started with passion is now undertaken as drudgery. While growth of the environmental industry may enjoy a three-point differential over the economy, I'm not convinced that environmental industry employee satisfaction shares that same three-point lead.

The answer lies in a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics Press Release summarizing second quarter productivity and cost data (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/prod2.nr0.htm>):

"Nonfarm business sector labor productivity increased at a 6.6 percent annual rate during the second quarter of 2009. This was the largest productivity increase since the third quarter of 2003, and reflects declines of 1.5 percent in output and 7.6 percent in hours worked."

Or as summarized in an excerpt from the previously referenced *Engineering News-Record* article (p.38): "Top 200 firms report that constrained staffing is a fact of life in the recession's new world order."

In other words, growth and productivity in our industry have come because our people have been willing to work longer, harder, and smarter. This

has never been a 40-hour per week profession so many work even longer, harder, and smarter than they did in good times. They've picked up the additional workload resulting from unfilled open positions. They've found ways to advance progress in the face of declining budgets and cash flow restrictions. They've pored over thousands of pages of draft legislation, enacted legislation, proposed regulations, and promulgated regulations to glean information that reduces costs, improves competitiveness, or points to new opportunities. And while the outlook for our industry may be brighter than most, our people are overworked and they realize that they must continue this pace "in the recession's new world order." The additional burden can be tolerated when there are other opportunities in the marketplace but can feel imprisoning when prospects for growth—internally or externally—are perceived as limited.

Given the hard work that has been completed and that which lies ahead, it's time for recognition and reward. As this year comes to a close, we're likely to find several opportunities to reward and recognize project team members. Taking advantage of opportunities to recognize and reward can rekindle enthusiasm, translating in improved morale and loyalty. There are hundreds of books and websites that offer suggestions for rewarding and recognizing employees but here are a few that can work within our profession:

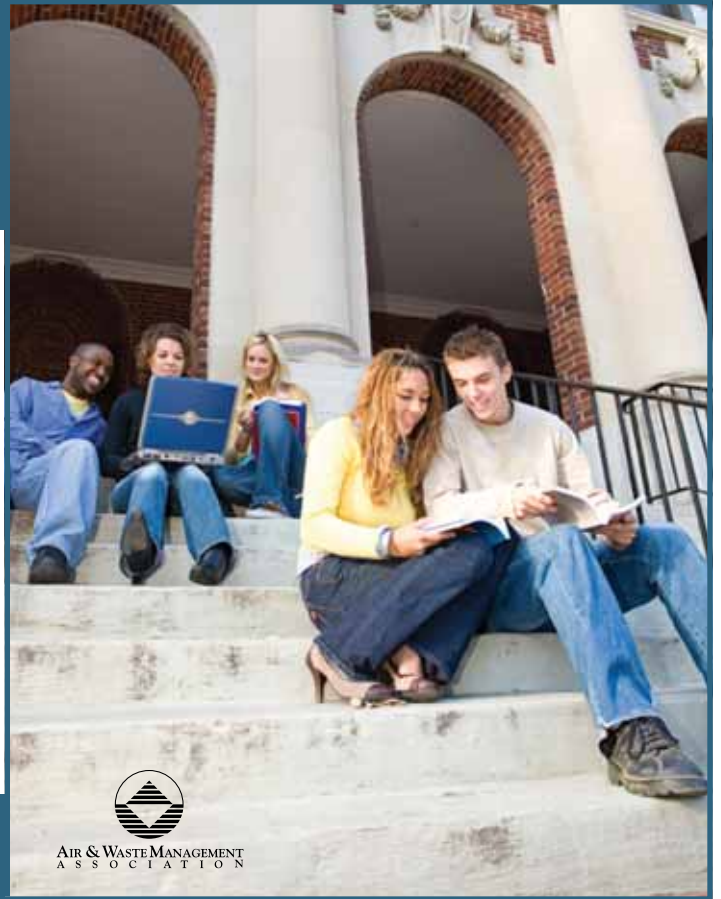
- 1. Recognize with written words.** I learned several years ago the importance of including a personalized message with a holiday greeting card when

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I was thanked for a few simple words I had penned in the card. Those few simple words targeted to the recipient meant much more than an imprinted greeting and a hurried signature would have. A personalized email highlighting a specific contribution or achievement will serve the purpose of a greeting card.

2. Recognize verbally. As the year came to a close we scheduled a team building meeting and invited a senior manager to address our group. The senior manager asked me to write a sentence summarizing a key accomplishment or contribution of each team member that would be attending the meeting. The senior manager then used his time to recognize each team member by name and specific accomplishment. The process consumed a substantial amount of our meeting time but it set the stage for a great meeting and one of the best years the group ever had.

3. Reward with project assignments. Most environmental professionals have a project they would like to implement or a project assignment

they would like to undertake. Help them free up time on other assignments so that they can contribute in these new areas. New assignments and responsibilities make us feel like we're working for progressive organizations that value and trust our contributions.

4. Reward with conference attendance. Offering team members the opportunity to present papers at conferences is an excellent way to recognize contributions, allow employees to build credentials, and gain recognition for the firm.

Many companies have standing policies and programs for recognizing and rewarding contributions and these programs should be used whenever practical; however, project managers may find that less formal tools can better build team morale, setting the stage for outstanding project performance in 2010.

And project performance will be the focus of this column in 2010. I hope you'll join me as we explore a range of financial performance criteria and metrics and their relationship to project management. **em**