

'Businesses must embrace' employee recognition

By Shawn Cumberbatch

More Barbadian businesses need to frequently recognise their team members' contribution to organisational success.

Caribbean Catalyst Inc. director Jacqueline Elias is confident that if they did so, the results would include improved employee engagement and an overall feeling of belonging.

The human resources expert was speaking to **BARBADOS BUSINESS AUTHORITY** ahead of her organisation's upcoming workshop titled **Recognition – Building Employee Morale**.

Scheduled for May 18, it will focus on "building a culture of genuine appreciation for excellence and improvement, which motivates team members individually and collectively".

"Typically and traditionally, we always think about recognising an employee of the month and employee of the year, but we have to move away from that and build a culture of recognition," Elias said.

She elaborated: "Recognition and reward tend to be used very interchangeably, but they are very different; they serve different goals. Reward is usually very tangible, it's less timely, and it's more associated with your performance or achieving something. Recognition is more than that.

"Recognition comes back to our basic human needs. We want to feel that we have a purpose, that we feel appreciated, we feel valued, and what we're doing, our contribution, is making a difference. So recognition is important, and because it's timely it's usually appreciated more once it's done on the spot at that point in time."

Different ways

Elias said this could be through "simple things like a handwritten note, or recognising and appreciating employees through a public forum or one-on-one meetings where you're praising the person for their efforts. So there are different ways that you can recognise somebody."

She stressed too, that it was important for leaders to know their team and that "it's important not to recognise somebody publicly, if that's what they hate, because then the impact of the recognition is going to be lost".

Elias shared that at the upcoming workshop Caribbean Catalyst would be utilising useful

information captured from its biennial Barbados Best Employers (BBE) programme, which started in 2010.

"Because of BBE programme, when we look at the correlation between praising somebody for their contribution, and recognising their contribution it is connected very closely with how you're engaged, because I am more engaged if I feel that I am valued," she said.

"We also look at sharing some best practices that we have seen throughout the BBE programme that can be very low- or no-cost initiatives that managers can do. So we show how you can build a culture of recognition. The training is really aimed at persons in people leadership roles that have the influence and lead a team."

Very interactive

The director added: "Everything we do is very practical and very interactive. So it's to understand what exists within your organisation now, and what you see as some of the challenges that you're faced [with], when you're giving assignments, because sometimes you give somebody a project to do and they've done it well, but you've never given them any feedback or praised them for that effort.

"And then, the second time around when you're asking them to do something again, and to take on a big project, they're apprehensive because they didn't get any feedback on how they did on the first one. And they don't know if it's really being valued, so their attitude may change. It is to understand that it's not just sitting down and delegating the work, but it's really having that discussion to give that feedback and recognise them if they have done a good job."

She noted that the difficulty was that "some businesses think that money is what is going to motivate their team members".

"Yes, money is important but it's not the only new motivating factor. People stay in a job and work on a job for a number of different reasons. It goes back to engagement and how engaged I am in the workplace. Do I give more than I need to because I am invested in this company and I want to see it grow? So reward is good, but the recognition is more about showing that caring connection," Elias said.

"It has to be very specific and tied to what



Caribbean Catalyst Inc. director Jacqueline Elias believes there is real value in employee recognition. (FP)

you're recognising the person for. And if you really do that, you're going to see a change. It could be little acts that you can do as a manager."

She gave the following example, stating: "So you see that your employees are stressed out, so you bring some snacks, or you have a pizza party and it's on your own accord. It's doing that to show that you're having that discussion to say, 'Look, I recognise you', but don't just have a pizza party and don't tell them why you're doing it. It has to be genuine, and it has to be very timely, and it has to be connected to something in order for them to see the value of that recognition."

Have a purpose

"People need to feel that they belong and so they want to feel that they are valued, they want to feel that they belong to something and they have a purpose. It also boils down to how well you know your team. So don't go and recognise one of your team members who is a vegetarian, with a steak dinner because the whole value of the effort is going to be lost. So make sure that you know your team and have that connection first."

Elias said the upcoming workshop would give leaders a forum "to really help you to understand what you can do better as a leader, how you can recognise and appreciate staff in different ways, and how you can help create that culture of recognition within your organisation, rather than wait until the performance review at the end of the year to give kudos".

"I think, hopefully, COVID-19 has taught us to have a greater appreciation for that. But the leader has to make it happen, to connect, and encourage their team. People want to feel loved and appreciated," she said.