

Excerpt from

Appreciate it!

The Playbook for
Employee Recognition

Debra Corey



Welcome to this document containing excerpts from my book titled *Appreciate it! The Playbook for Employee Recognition*. It was created to start you on your journey to drive change at your company, sharing with you the ‘four golden rules,’ a model called the ‘recognition pyramid,’ and examples to bring it all to life. I hope you find it helpful, and I encourage you to use it to rebelliously challenge the status quo of traditional recognition to add the exclamation point to appreciation at your company!

Introduction

Over the years, employee recognition has moved from a ‘nice to have’ to a ‘have to have,’ with 87% of organizations now having some form of recognition program. This is because they’ve seen or heard of its power, with studies showing the positive impact it can have on **revenue** (two times higher revenue with recognition), **employee engagement** (14% higher engagement with recognition) and **employee burnout** (43% lower burnout with recognition) to name a few.

It’s also because their people are saying that they want to be recognized, with over 90% saying that recognition is **important to them**, and 37% saying that it’s more important to them than pay, training or getting a promotion. And when asked, 82% of employees have said that recognition is a leading factor in helping them **improve their performance**, and 79% have said that being recognized would make them **work harder**.

But with 65% of employees saying they don’t feel appreciated and 87% saying their company’s recognition program is “stale, outdated, or used as disguised compensation,” **clearly something’s not working and something needs to change!**

Change needs to happen

We need to step out of and step into new ways of looking at and doing recognition. We need to fundamentally readdress **why** we recognize, **what** we recognize and **how** we recognize, challenging traditional ways of thinking and acting.

And, we need to change our focus to be on the ‘**appreciation feeling**’ - a feeling where every employee feels appreciated, not just a few. Where recognition occurs for all of the small things that matter and make a difference, and not just the big ones. Where recognition happens continuously, and not just every year or every five years. And where your people feel valued and appreciated through genuine, meaningful and inclusive recognition.

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou

Four 'golden rules' of recognition

To help you make meaningful and effective changes in your recognition strategy and programs, let me share with you what I call the 'four golden rules of recognition.' These are guiding philosophies and principles I've used over the years to design or redesign recognition programs, using them to drive and deliver that appreciation feeling.

1 Make recognition meaningful	2 Make recognition unified	3 Shine a spotlight on recognition	4 Make recognition timely
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These four rules form the acronym 'MUST,' with each letter standing for a key point. Together, they create a call to action, what we 'must' do to achieve our recognition objectives. Here is a high level overview taken from my book for each of these rules. I encourage you test them against how you are currently recognizing at your company:

M – Make recognition meaningful

Let's start with the letter 'M,' which stands for making employee recognition meaningful. This is critical so that the recipient truly feels recognized, and it happens when you deliver meaning in both what you say and what you do, showing the person that you have seen, value and appreciate their specific contributions. Here are three tips to help you achieve this:

1. Get recognition messages right

The 'say,' which are your recognition messages, is absolutely critical to the success of a recognition moment. Saying "thanks for your help," although very nice, does little to make the person feel recognized since there's likely little to no understanding of what they've done to merit that recognition. If instead, the message says, "Thanks for coming in early to prepare and distribute materials to the team to help them understand how the new office scheduling system will work. You've really lived our company value of 'owning it,' and by doing this it's made it easier for everyone to understand their role in this new process" the person knows specifically what they've done, and how they've helped you and others.

2. Get recognition rewards right

Just as important as the 'say' is the 'do,' creating meaning by what you do to recognize your people through your recognition rewards. Sometimes it's non-financial, with the message being the reward, and other times it's financial, with some token being given to recognize your people for their achievements and contributions.

When it comes to selecting the most meaningful reward it's important to keep these two things in mind: 1) Consider the connection between the reward and the contribution, making sure that they're aligned (e.g. if it is small contribution the reward should be small,

if it was a larger contribution, the reward should be larger). 2) Consider differences in your workforce when determining rewards to meet their diverse set of needs.

3. **Create meaning in what you recognize**

And finally, it's important to recognize the actions and behaviors that not only help your employees feel appreciated, but help your business achieve their objectives and success. If you don't do this, then quite frankly you're flushing the time and money you spend on recognition down the drain.

The most effective way to do this is by recognizing your employees against your company values. As I talk about in my book '*Bringing Your Values Out to Play*,' this does three things: 1) It creates focus - like a dartboard, showing your employees the target they are shooting for. 2) You signal that values are important – putting them front and center, and not hidden away in an employee handbook or on a poster hanging in the office. 3) You create habits by recognizing against them.

Recognizing your people against your company values is like a live classroom experience, teaching and demonstrating what your values mean and how they look in real-time, and in the moment.

U – Make recognition unified

The next golden rule focuses on designing recognition programs that are unified and inclusive. It's important that recognition does not create a divide or wedge between your workforce, with the 'haves' and 'have nots' based on location, department, manager or function, to name a few.

Instead, recognition needs to be universal, making it available for all to give and all to receive, thus increasing your chances of creating a recognition culture and achieving your recognition objectives. Here are two tips to help you achieve this:

1. **Create a crowdsourcing approach to giving recognition**

The first part of being unified and inclusive has to do with who you allow to give recognition through the design of your programs. When companies limit it to just managers a few things can happen. First, it creates a 'them' and 'us' situation as employees miss out on the opportunity of giving recognition, which has been proven to be just as important as receiving recognition. And second, it limits the number of recognition moments that are given as it reduces the number of people involved, which can directly or indirectly lead to feelings of exclusion.

For this reason, more and more companies have adopted a peer-to-peer approach to recognition, or what I like to think of as a 'crowdsourcing' approach, as it encourages your people to work together to create and have collective responsibility for recognition.

2. **Challenge your approach for determining who gets recognized**

The next part of making recognition unified and inclusive has to do with who can receive recognition, and I believe this is an area where much work still needs to be done. Too often, we put limits on who can be recognized, e.g. only one person can win employee of the month, or only six people can win employee of the year, etc. By doing this it can create feelings of exclusion, create negative reactions and reduce the impact and power of recognition.

We need to practice equal opportunity recognition, looking at recognition through an inclusion lens, making sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to be noticed, appreciated and recognized.

S – Shine a spotlight on recognition

Let's next move on to the letter 'S,' which stands for shining a spotlight on recognition. In the past, recognition was done in a very private way, between the sender and the receiver, but over the years we've come to see the importance of changing this to put it under the spotlight and watch the magic happen. The benefit is that it showcases what good and great look like to your workforce, it multiplies the impact as others see and get involved with the recognition, and it connects your people in a positive, meaningful and uplifting way.

Here are four examples from my book on how companies do this:

- **Share through a recognition platform**

At Reward Gateway, when employees send one another recognition e-cards they appear on a social recognition digital wall. From here, anyone can comment or post reactions, participating and engaging with the recognition.

- **Share stories at company meetings**

At Atlassian, they share and showcase recognition stories during the monthly global town hall call, with the sender telling the story and sharing the positive behaviors.

- **Share stories during onboarding**

At the University of Lincoln, they take case studies from their annual recognition awards and weave them into their onboarding process to show what good looks like and to highlight how recognition is done.

- **Create digital badges**

At Shell Energy Retail, they created digital badges that employees are awarded for receiving three or more recognition nominations for the same company value. These can then be displayed in their email signature, which showcases to their global colleagues over and over again their recognition actions.

T – Make recognition timely

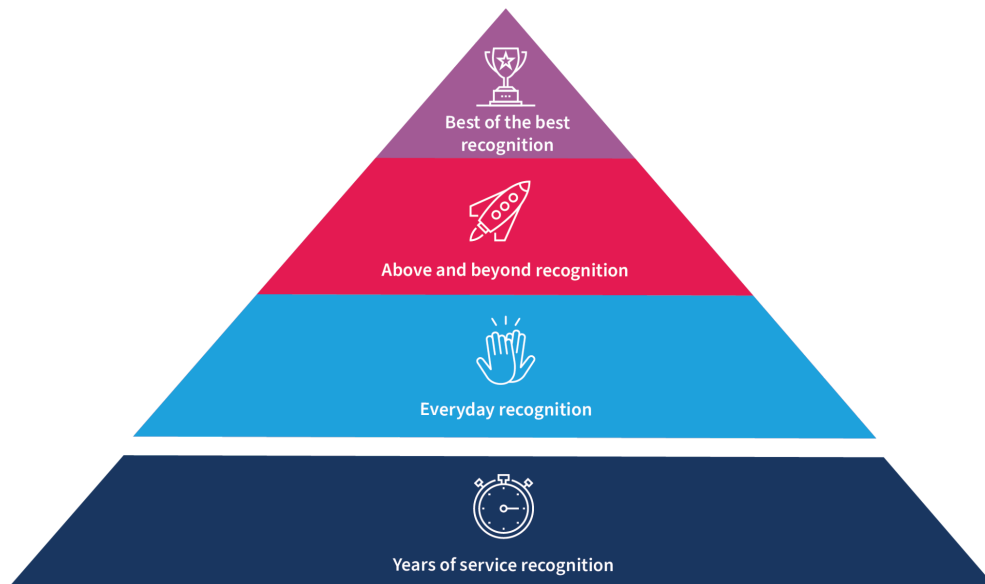
The last letter of the acronym is 'T,' which stands for making recognition timely, and focuses on the 'when' of recognition. We've made strides in this area, reflecting on what we've learned and how we've responded to changes in the workplace, but there is still much work to be done. According to one survey, only 36% of companies are giving timely recognition, meaning that employees at six in 10 companies are having to wait to receive recognition.

The word 'timely' means to do something in an appropriate time frame, which is a bit wishy-washy, as what does 'appropriate time frame' really mean? I believe that this is part of the problem as we all interpret it differently. Does it mean giving recognition once a week, once a month? What, exactly, is the 'appropriate time frame' to give recognition? I propose that instead, we focus the definition and our efforts on the gap, the time frame between the moment the behavior or action happens and the moment the recognition occurs. If we remove the hurdles and make giving recognition easy, there is no excuse for waiting, and we can all move to what is commonly called "in the moment" recognition.

Why wait until a certain day of the week or month to give recognition, why not give it now before you forget AND the impact of the recognition wears off?

The recognition pyramid

Next, let me share with you a model that I write about in my book called the ‘recognition pyramid.’ It’s a tool that I’ve used over the years to help visualize and develop recognition programs and plans, covering both the depth and breadth of appreciation, providing a comprehensive and complementary way to capture all of the ‘moments that matter.’



Here are high level definitions for the four levels of the recognition pyramid:

- **The everyday level**

The bottom level of the pyramid, the widest part, is typically given by anyone at any time for day-to-day accomplishments and achievements. For this reason, it touches the most employees as it happens the most frequently. It recognizes moments that, although important, are of low impact, meaning they impact a small number of people and/or customers with minimal impact to them and with little extra work and effort required.

- **The above and beyond level**

Here is where the pyramid starts getting a bit narrower, symbolizing how fewer employees would typically receive this type of recognition as it’s harder to reach this level of achievement. It recognizes moments that are of higher impact, meaning where employees or teams have excelled, going above and beyond to get the job done. Think of it as a ladder, with employees needing to work that much harder to get to the next rung of the ladder, which in this case is your recognition plan.

- **The best of the best level**

The top level of the pyramid symbolizes those who went above and beyond the most – often outside of their typical job role – symbolizing performing at the highest level within your organization. It recognizes moments that are of the highest impact, having a larger or more long-term impact on a group or the business, requiring more work and effort to

accomplish this. Again, think of it as a ladder, but this time think of the bell at the top that you ring when you get to the very top.

- **Years of service level**

And finally, there is the years of service level of the pyramid, which celebrates and recognizes employees at certain service milestones. You'll notice that this sits outside of the other levels, and that's because it does not directly relate to specific actions, behaviors and impacts, which the others do. For this reason, I believe it is best to leave it as a separate and standalone level, not trying to squeeze it under one of your other levels or recognition plans.

Steps for building a recognition pyramid

Each company's recognition pyramid is different since each company's mission, values, culture and workforce are different. For this reason it's important to build your pyramid to best suit your needs. To assist you with this, in my book I share the following six steps that I use when I go through this process:

1 Determine your recognition objectives	2 Set your recognition principles	3 Determine the number of levels
4 Design your recognition plans	5 Decide how your recognition plans will work	6 Design your recognition branding

1. Determine your recognition objectives

The first step is to set your recognition strategy by determining your objectives. You do this by answering the question 'why'— why do you want and need to recognize your workforce? This will give you the target to aim for as you develop your individual recognition plans. Or, as Simon Sinek, author of *Start With Why*, says, "When you start with why in everything that you do, you inspire action in a way that what doesn't.

2. Set your recognition principles

Now that you've answered the critical 'why' question, you have one more thing to do before moving on to build your recognition program, and that is to create your recognition principles. These are what help you define your program, what it stands for, what makes it unique and what it says to your employees and the external marketplace. Finding the right principles will help you create recognition plans which truly drive and support your 'why,' aligning with your company's mission, values and culture.

You may be wondering, what is the difference between your recognition objectives and principles? Your objectives are high-level, and your principles are the next level. Your

principles need to guide the design of your recognition program so that your recognition objectives are met. They are both important, and need to be determined and set up front.

3. Determine the number of levels

It's now time to start building your recognition pyramid, and where you'll be getting into the nitty-gritty details by answering the important questions of 'what,' 'who' and 'how.' But before you do this, you need to build the framework of your pyramid and determine the number of levels that it will have. Think of it as a blueprint for your program – the clearer the levels are in your pyramid, the more successful it will be in helping you achieve your objectives.

Now before you ask me how many levels there should be in your pyramid, let me say that there is no perfect or magic number, the key here is to come up with the number of levels that will ultimately help you meet your recognition objectives. If it takes one level to do this, great! And if it's four, that's fine as well.

Companies have varying numbers of levels in their recognition pyramid

When writing the book, I conducted a survey where I asked companies to name the levels that they had within their own recognition programs (pyramids). Here's what they reported back:

- Everyday recognition – 84%
- Above and beyond recognition – 78%
- Best of the best recognition – 66%
- Years of service recognition – 83%

To download a free copy of the full survey results, go to www.debcohr.com/free-resources

4. Design your recognition plans

Once you've decided on your recognition levels, the next step is to design your individual recognition plans. To do this, you'll need to determine the 'what,' 'who' and 'when' for each of your recognition levels. As you go through this, it will help you decide if you need one recognition plan per level or multiple ones. The key is to take your time to thoroughly answer these questions, constantly referring back to the recognition moments collected from the say/do exercise, getting input and feedback along the way, and keeping in mind your overall recognition objectives.

5. Decide how your recognition plans will work

The next question to answer is the 'how' – how will you ensure that your recognition program and individual recognition plans deliver on your objectives once they're in place? I want to stress that this is just as important as designing the 'right' recognition program, for I've seen fantastic ones fail if this isn't done well. During this step you'll address the following key topics:

- a. **Manage** – how will you manage and operationalize your recognition plan?
- b. **Communicate** – how will you communicate your recognition plans to ensure your employees engage with them?
- c. **Train** – how will you train your workforce to ensure they understand and engage with recognition?
- d. **Measure** – how will you measure your recognition programs to understand if/how they are meeting your objectives?

6. Design your recognition branding

The final decisions you'll need to make relate to the branding of your recognition program, which includes the names and designs. Although this isn't absolutely necessary, I've found it to be extremely helpful in making that all-important first impression with your employees, making them decide in an instant whether they'll engage with your recognition program or not. I actually love working on this step, as it's where you give your hard work a meaningful and often fun personality.

I suggest that when you develop your names, you involve your employees to help you do this. It not only creates a sense of ownership, but 'my' best names have come from my workforce. Here are some examples of some of the names I've either used or have seen to help inspire you if you're looking for a name for your recognition program:

- Above & beyond
- Accolate
- AllStars
- Applause
- Cheers
- Inspire
- Kudos
- Shine
- Simply Thanks
- Stand Out
- Star
- The Extra Mile

When you name your program, go back to the concept of a 'feeling,' and come up with ones that deliver the right feeling for the right actions and behaviors.

Sample plays

In my book I share stories, or what I call 'plays,' of what 36 companies from around the world are doing to deliver appreciation through their recognition programs in their own unique and meaningful way. By doing this it brings the concepts to life, inspiring readers to find their own way and voice when it comes to recognition. In this document, I've included excerpts from two of these plays, selecting ones that differ when it comes to their location, industry and recognition pyramid and programs.

Heineken

Company

Founded in 1864 in Amsterdam, today, Heineken is one of the world's largest brewers, serving over 25 million beers each day across over 190 markets. They believe that quality is measured not in the size of their brand but in the purity of their beer, having an uncompromising passion for consumers and customers, enjoyment of life, the courage to dream and pioneer and care for people and the planet. They have over 84,000 colleagues located across the globe, with 2,400 located in the U.K.

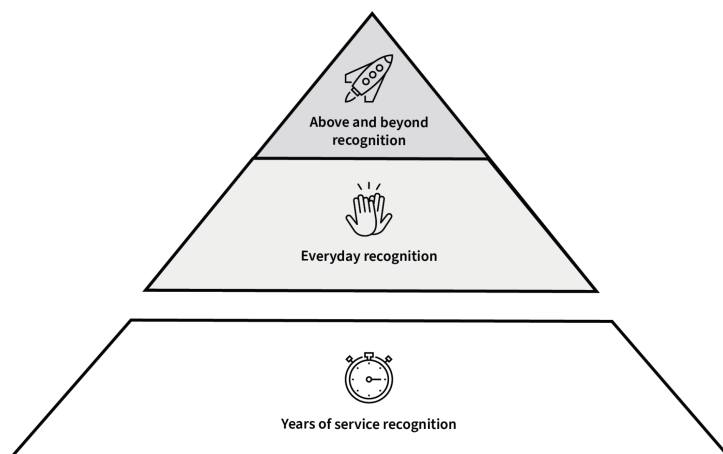
Overview

Back in 2018, with only 40 prizes of £1,000 available each year to a workforce of 2,400, Heineken U.K.'s recognition program was only reaching 2% of their colleagues. And because of this, according to their annual engagement survey, only 20% answered positively to the question "I receive recognition when I do a good job."

Armed with this data, and comments from colleagues saying they wanted recognition throughout the year, appreciation for going the extra mile, and to be able to share and celebrate success across the company, they set out to develop a modern, flexible and values-led recognition program.

The result was a new online recognition program that they call "BREWARDS & Recognition" that recognizes different levels of achievement, bringing it all together in a seamless journey to meet the needs of their diverse and dispersed workforce. Since the launch in January 2019, 98% of colleagues have actively used BREWARDS & Recognition, with a total of 6,700 awards being issued, recognizing and celebrating the demonstration of the Heineken behaviors.

Recognition Program



There are three levels and four individual plans in Heineken U.K.'s recognition program:



Anytime peer-to-peer e-cards: These are available on their recognition platform, and can be sent by anyone at any time, and shared on their virtual social recognition wall. By doing this it aligns with a key element of the Heineken behaviors, “We play to win and celebrate success.”



“Cheers!” Awards - anytime manager awards: The next level is Cheers! Awards, which people managers can send out at any time at their discretion to reward individuals in their team or any other part of the business. The colleague instantly receives £50 to spend on the BREWards & Recognition platform, with no approval being required.



“IPA” Awards - anytime peer-to-peer nominated awards: To further encourage peer-to-peer recognition, Heineken has Inspiring People Awards (IPA), being a play on Indian Pale Ale. For these awards, colleagues can nominate one another for going above and beyond. They can receive from £100 to £1,000 to be spent on the BREWards & Recognition platform or a day off work, or a dinner at one of their pubs. Recognition champions from each function review and approve nominations with their leadership team, along with the frequency and amounts.



Years of service recognition: At Heineken U.K., they recognize 25 and 35 years of service, rewarding employees with a monetary value to spend on the BREWards & Recognition platform. In 2022, they are reviewing and revising this plan, determining how best to recognize years of service going forward.

Zappos

Company

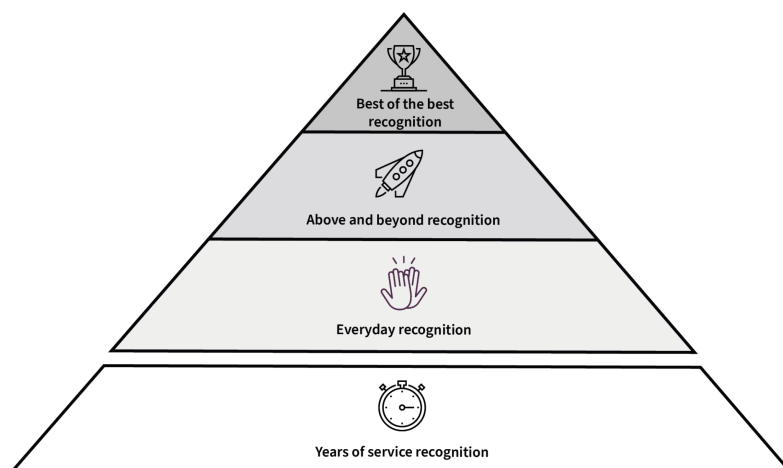
Zappos, which is an adaptation of “zapatos,” the Spanish word for shoes, began in 1999 as a small, online retailer that only sold shoes. Today, they still sell shoes as well as clothing, handbags, accessories and more. That “more” is providing the very best customer service, customer experience and company culture. They aim to inspire the world by showing it's possible to simultaneously deliver happiness to customers, employees, vendors, shareholders and the community in a long-term, sustainable way. Zappos has around 1,500 employees located in the U.S. and Canada.

Overview

At Zappos, they believe that anything worth doing is worth doing with WOW, which they define as “doing something a little unconventional and innovative that has an emotional impact on the receiver.” And when it comes to recognition, they’ve absolutely delivered wow in both the depth and breadth of their formal and informal recognition programs, going above and beyond to help their employees, or what they call “Zapponians,” feel appreciated.

Recognition at Zappos started out very basic, with the HR team hand-decorating stars that were put on sticks to look like magic wands, and presenting them to employees to proudly display at their desks. Since then, a variety of new recognition plans have been added that let employees decide how best to wow one another. “We don’t believe in a one-size-fits-all approach, we want to provide different ways to recognize so that our people can pick and choose what speaks to them and their team culture,” said Maritza Lewis, Employee Engagement Manager.

Recognition Program



There are four levels and five individual plans in Zappos’s recognition program:



Anytime informal discretionary recognition: The first level of recognition at Zappos is discretionary, with each team adopting their own method and approach. For example, the HR team does something they call “snaps,” which is when they shout

out recognition messages to one another during their weekly calls, snapping as this is done to celebrate these achievements together.



“Zappos Zollars” - anytime peer-to-peer awards: The next level is Zappos Zollars, which is what they call their internal currency, and can be awarded by anyone through their digital platform at any time to fellow Zapponians for living their company values. Once signed off by HR, the recipient can choose from a variety of gifts – from a gift card, to company swag, to donating to charity, to bath bombs or food. The award offering is constantly being refreshed, with frequent check-ins with employees to find out what is right for them.



“Co-Worker Bonus” - anytime peer-to-peer cash awards: The next level was introduced as an experiment, but has become so popular that it’s now a key element of their recognition program. As with Zappos Zollars, a bonus can be awarded by anyone through their digital platform at any time to fellow Zapponians for living their company values. Each month, employees have \$50 they can award as cash rewards, either all to one colleague or as two \$25 awards. These awards are not carried over from month to month, and do require signoff by HR.



“GOAT Award” - monthly leadership award: The top level is their GOAT Award, which stands for greatest of all time, and is an award that has been developed for the customer loyalty team. Leaders from this group each month nominate someone who has really gone above and beyond, and then together select the person who most deserves the award. The recipient receives a life-size toy goat, a \$250 gift card and is recognized in a company-wide email to share their story and celebrate their achievements.



Years of service recognition: Employees are recognized every year at Zappos. In their first year they receive a personalized license plate along with some Zappos Zollars. In subsequent years they receive a sticker similar to what you get from the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) to show that your car is registered for another year and an increased amount of Zappos Zollars. The color of the license plates change every five years to show these important milestones.

About the author

Debra Corey is a highly experienced and award-winning HR leader, four-time author, world-class speaker, and was named one of the top 101 global employee engagement influencers. She's had a varied and exciting career over the last 20+ years, working for global companies such as Gap Inc., Merlin Entertainments, and Reward Gateway to name a few.

Debra has moved into what she calls the 'pay it forward' part of her career. Acting as Chief Pay it Forward Officer at DebCo HR, she's using her experience to assist and influence others to develop and deliver HR strategies in a rebellious way, pushing the boundaries and challenging the status quo to truly drive employee engagement.



Her latest book titled "*Appreciate it! The Playbook for Employee Recognition*" is a call to action and call for change for anyone who is interested in creating a culture of appreciation through their recognition strategies and programs, one that doesn't focus on the fancy trophy, expensive gifts or money, but on a feeling. Here's what some people have said about the book:

- Debra's new book is a fresh look at recognition, with a blueprint, helpful tools and case studies to help you find new creative ways to do it right.

Eric Hutcherson, Chief People & Inclusion Officer at Universal Music Group

- A must-read that is a treasure trove of practical and pragmatic ideas rooted in science and evidence-based practice to inspire workforces to perform to their highest potential. **Eric Severson, Chief People & Belonging Officer at Neiman Marcus**

- Debra's latest contribution to the world of work is both timely and necessary, advocating a complete rethink of how we can more inclusively and holistically recognize and value our people. This book is a must have for any serious HR practitioner to enable recognition to become a central part of your people strategy.

Shakil Butt, Founder and CEO of HR Hero for Hire Ltd.