

Real-time recognition

New kits help managers instantly reward outstanding performance

By Wilson Chow

Photos by Gail Hanusa/Boeing

Whether it's helping an airline configure its airplane or helping out with airplane deliveries, the Customer Engineering team in Commercial Airplanes is up for the challenge. Indeed, the team is accustomed to expediently handling engineering requests from airline customers and solving related problems.

The team recently took on an issue that had little to do with customers or engineering: making it easier to recognize fellow team members for their accomplishments.

The best way to recognize an employee is to be specific and timely, according to Alisoun Lamb, Customer Engineering staff analyst, who adds that recognizing positive behaviors can encourage employees and make a team more successful.

"We wanted to find a way to make Pride@Boeing recognition more instant," Lamb said.

"A 'thank you' is great, but giving or getting something over and above that is even better."

– Pete Olson, account manager, Customer Engineering, Commercial Airplanes



PHOTO: The creators of the Customer Engineering manager's instant recognition kit, Ruth Weeda (left), Karen Myers and Alisoun Lamb, won the Most Widely Adopted Improvement award at the Commercial Airplanes Airplane System Lean Fest in June.



As a Pride@Boeing recognition focal, “I knew we had to do something to make our current recognition more successful, something managers could have at their fingertips for a quick and easy way to instantly recognize employees,” said Karen Myers, executive office administrator, Customer Engineering.

Myers, Lamb and a colleague, Ruth Weeda, a Customer Engineering configuration management specialist, set out to develop an instant recognition kit that managers could carry with them. The portable kits are intended to help foster a culture within Customer Engineering where managers and even employees are encouraged to recognize one another for their contributions to the team.

Myers, Lamb and Weeda believed that managers would use instant recognition more if recognition items were easier to access.

“We had seen other recognition kits that were bulky, and we knew our managers wouldn’t use them,” Lamb said. “What’s the point of having the kits if they just sit on desks? We thought, what is it that managers could easily use and would carry with them to meetings?”

Weeda said the idea finally clicked after the trio saw some notebook organizers, which people carry with them to take notes, keep track of appointments and other information.

AN IDEA COMES TOGETHER

The team used a notebook organizer to build a prototype of an instant recognition kit. The result? A notebook organizer that managers can use to accomplish their daily tasks—since each has space for a cell phone and paperwork, and contains a notepad. But these organizers also incorporate common instant recognition items—such as gift cards for the Boeing Store, cafeteria tokens and movie tickets (the selection of items vary among sites)—and a card for managers to record which item each employee prefers. Recognition focals help managers refill empty kits.

Since the kits have been distributed, managers have been quick to use them, Lamb said.

Derek Fialho, an account manager in Customer Engineering, said although he already gets satisfaction from his daily work, “it helps to have little incentives.” Fellow account manager Pete Olson agreed. “A ‘thank you’ is great, but giving or getting something over and above that is even better.”

While employees are formally recognized for significant accomplishments, managers use the instant recognition notebooks to help them be more effective leaders and build stronger connections with their teams.

“This is one of the simplest and most practical methods anyone could use to send the message ‘I care about you,’ at the right time and place,” said Ali Shami, Customer Engineering regional manager for Europe, Russia and Central Asia and leasing programs. “The recognition notebook is a great tool to encourage more instant recognition.”

AN IDEA DISCOVERED

The kits were first introduced in Customer Engineering in late 2007, and since then, other organizations across Boeing have adopted the idea, including groups in the Puget Sound region, Long Beach, Calif., Colorado and St. Louis.

“We’re getting requests left and right to find out how it works and how they can do it,” Lamb said.

It’s difficult to estimate just how many instant recognition kits are now in use, but the team at Commercial Airplanes Customer Engineering knows they can affect the work environment positively and help build morale.

“People like to feel appreciated and recognized,” Myers said. “There is a lot more instant recognition going on now than there used to be.” ■

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Everything needed to say: ‘Good job’



Recognition kits have been distributed to managers in Commercial Airplanes Customer Engineering to help them when it comes time to single out fellow team members for accomplishments. Here’s what you need to build a manager’s instant recognition kit:

- Three-ring, 8.5-by-11-inch notebook organizer
- Clear business card pages
- Zippered pouches
- Inventory checklist
- Employee preference card
- Information sheet on reasons to recognize and tips on effective recognition
- Various instant recognition items (selection varies by site), such as:
 - Boeing Store gift cards
 - Movie tickets
 - Massage certificates
 - Cafeteria tokens
 - Vouchers (to allow for redemption of larger items)