

# Doing the Right Thing

USING RECOGNITION TO STAY AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME



“Recognition is not soft. It’s not mystical. It’s not just an ‘American thing.’ When we get recognized, people are noticing what we do. Everyone wants that.”

— ROBERT ORDEVER,  
PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR,  
FULHAM FOOTBALL CLUB

It could be argued that football fans are the most passionate fans in the world. They’ll roar for victory, cry over missed chances and debate every substitution, every call, every play. What if these were your customers and your challenge was to continually provide a world-class experience? Then you would need to find the best people and motivate them to work at the top of their game.

This is a philosophy Fulham Football Club has embraced. Founded in 1879, each year they work hard to maintain their status in the English Premier League. Being in this elite membership of the top 20 football teams translates into the difference of making or losing a large portion of their income—estimated around £50 million pounds per season.

“The reality is that it’s extremely hard work, lots of weekends and a massive team effort. We have to be motivated and keep all our people motivated,” points out Robert Ordever, People Development Director. “There’s a great responsibility to stay upbeat. If we have motivated people working around the training ground it creates a positive environment for the players and the team.”

After listening to Chester Elton deliver an O.C. Tanner Learning Group keynote speech, Ordever saw where recognition could help, “We’ve tended to treat recognition as something that happens in award presentations perhaps monthly, perhaps every two months, and what we were missing out on was the power of praising the smaller milestones.”

It’s simple really: Thank people at the right times for doing the right thing. As Ordever explains, “We were cheering the goal, but not cheering the great passes and moves that lead to the goal. And not doing it at the instant, at the moment, made us miss our chance to have that behavior repeated. If you can show people what ‘great’ looks like, you’ll see it repeated.”

Ordever invited the O.C. Tanner Learning Group to train 150 managers as a way to get the message out. “O.C. Tanner’s training tied into our values and showed our managers the impact appreciation does have on business.”

A message that is being received, “I believe in any organization there is a certain amount of cynicism when it comes to saying ‘thank you’, but the Learning Group presentation overcame that,” says Graham Gilmore, Venues Operations Director. “To sit in our own

environment and learn about this concept of recognition and appreciation put us all on the same playing field. We were all given the same challenge. And though it might not be comfortable, we laughed our way through it.”

“Every idea goes through the ridicule, discuss, adopt phases—and this was no different,” explains Ordever. “The idea of the ‘soft thank you’ may not seem natural to my managers or fit into what can be a macho environment. But almost immediately after our sessions, I have received very positive feedback. It’s being discussed. The key for me is what we do with this knowledge next: adopt a culture of appreciation into our organization.”

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