

THE
RECOGNITION MICROSCOPE

...

FUEL FOR HUMAN ACCELERATION

...

ADRIAN GOSTICK & CHESTER ELTON

It's a Petri dish of discovery. And, we're all bathing in it.

Can “it” accelerate your performance? Truth being told, “it” already has in certain areas of your organization.

But, what is “it?”

Science continues to unveil startling new evidence about the human potential—DNA can be analyzed, and brain chemistry precisely monitored. Under a microscope, researchers have cracked the genetic code, discovered genes that are believed to cause physiological defects or even inspire physical prowess. Yet, while bombarded with studies culling the intricacies of biological investigations, the most powerful aspect of human performance seems to be dismissed.

Why? The answer is simple. A microscope cannot measure the impact of recognition—the accolades or appreciation offered between two or more humans for achievements, efforts, attitudes, or attributes.

What happened the first time someone congratulated Jesse Owens on being fast? What happened the first, second, or third time someone told Bono he could sing, Seinfeld he was funny, Oprah she was engaging, Gates he was brilliant, or Lincoln he could lead? What did someone tell you? When someone recognized your achievement, effort, attitude, or attribute, what happened? Human acceleration happened—instantly, and passionately.

Can recognition be analyzed under a microscope?

Categorized here as a business manifesto, you might assume that recognition ROI—what we call the return on “Carrots”—would be the first order of conversation. In other words, how purpose-based recognition can boost your bottom line, motivate employees to achieve, and create high-performance teams. And, because most readers here are searching for quick, easy to execute applications, you may even assume that a prescriptive “how-to” focus should warrant an initial discussion. Or, maybe even more to the point, scientific research should be presented to qualify the case for the most effective human performance accelerant in existence—recognition. The ROI is astounding. The application is easily trainable. And now there’s global research proving that recognition accelerates human performance to a level beyond comparison in every culture studied—the impact has no boundaries, and the way humans respond to recognition reveals an outstanding driver of performance. All that said, the most revealing analysis under the microscope begins within ourselves—the results of which we can all qualify, quantify, and measure.

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ANALYSIS #1—YOU.

Extensive research has been conducted in the United States and abroad focusing on how purpose-based recognition drives human performance in the workplace. And, although the research alone can surely cause significant neurological stimulation for any manager, the initial analysis of the role recognition plays within human acceleration must begin with a simple sociological discussion of you. Consider your childhood, your elementary education, your early years in sporting, music or drama events, and those nights spent around the kitchen table with your parents trudging through your homework. Sure, there was a biological response when a parent, friend, classmate, coach, or teacher specifically recognized you. But, because no one was there to measure your biological responses, the first analysis must be broken down into something no one wants to admit is part of the cut-throat world of business—feelings.

How did you feel when you were recognized? Chances are, whether you received recognition for your math aptitude, your artistic ability, your athletic abilities, your sense of humor or even your hairstyle, the act of being recognized triggered a response that repeated your action, your effort, or even made you focus more intently on that attribute. Let's face it; Pavlov was onto something. Ding... Recognition is the bell that drives human behavior. Consider your career goals, your proudest achievements, or even your most passionate hobbies. Most likely, you've chosen a path that is within your realm of "interests"—a path that directly correlates to an activity that in some point in your life was recognized.

ANALYSIS #2—THEM.

Do Carrots create the same “feeling” response in other humans? Does recognition accelerate human performance? As much as we all like to think we’re unique, extensive research has been conducted proving that recognition is a driver of human performance, period—accelerating the performance of children, teens, spouses, frontline workers, middle managers, and members of executive teams. And, not only do humans at every stage in life respond similarly to recognition when it’s directed specifically toward their actions, achievements, efforts, or attributes, but they also respond favorably to witnessing frequent recognition of their peers—they want to emulate the people being recognized.

Does the research prove this? Is recognition truly an accelerator?

When we surveyed more than 200,000 managers and employees over a 10-year period, the question “My organization recognizes excellence,” returned results that the Wall Street Journal called “stunning.” Organizations that scored in the lowest 25% for recognition had an average Return on Equity of just 2.4 percent, whereas those that scored in the top fourth had an average ROE more than three times higher. In other words, companies that most effectively recognize are much more profitable than those that do so the worst—an important finding in this economy. And, in response to, “My manager does a good job of recognizing employee contributions,” the teams and offices rated most highly by employees typically place in the top percentage of scores for customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and retention. But, the results don’t stop there. Of the people who report the highest morale at work, 94.4% agree that their managers are effective at recognition. In contrast, only 2.4 % of people who have low morale say they have a boss who is great at recognition.

Again, these results are just a small portion of one of the most extensive and in-depth studies ever conducted on workplace productivity, involving 10 years of research conducted for us by HealthStream Research.

So, is the research considered a workplace study or a human nature study?

It's both. However, interestingly enough, although workplace cultures, norms, and expectations differ immensely across the globe, the impact recognition plays on human performance remains nearly parallel. Recognition worldwide is just as much an accelerator globally as it is in the United States and Canada. It drives behaviors that are linked to employee engagement, motivation, commitment, trust, accountability... and the list continues. From country to country, employee engagement scores in a massive global study were as much as two or three times higher when a manager offered frequent, specific and timely recognition—numbers that the researchers at Towers Perrin, a leading global human capital consulting firm who conducted this latest research for us, called not only statistically significant, but impressive in size and impact.

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ANALYSIS #3—IT.

Disseminating the differences between “You” and your feelings, and “Them” and the wealth of data collected during the previously mentioned studies proves little value, as “We” (our species) all respond the same to recognition—if, and only if, it meets certain criteria.

So, when will recognition accelerate performance?

Offering kudos to a class of sixth-grade students for remaining quiet during class may inspire repeat behavior, but it won’t drive human performance. Nevertheless, pull a student in front of the class who sets a standard of excellent behavior, and specify the details of that student’s behavior as it relates to the goals or objectives of the class, and you’ve just applied the right kind of recognition—purpose-based recognition.

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In business, and the extensive research projects mentioned in our book *The Carrot Principle* bear this out, purpose-based recognition has been proven to accelerate performance, engage employees, reduce turnover, and boost productivity.

To create dramatic results, and recreate the emotions that drive human behavior, research reveals that recognition is most effective when it meets 5 certain criteria points. It must be Positive, Immediate, Close, Specific, and Shared.

1. Positive: Remembering a negative behavior and speaking about how much better a person has become is not positive. Recognition is not a time for correction, but must only detail the positive.

2. Immediate: The closer the recognition to the actual performance the better. It shows that you notice behavior and are paying attention.

3. Close: Recognition is best presented in the natural environment of the performance being recognized (at home, school, or where they work in the office) among peers.

4. Specific: Recognizing specific behaviors that reinforce key values, goals, or even interests will have the greatest impact on initiating repeat behaviors.

5. Shared: Often, recognition comes from the top down. However, recognition that means the most often comes from peers who best understand the circumstances surrounding the person's performance.

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ANALYSIS #4—Us.

A manifesto? We're just recognizers who recognize the impact of the most overlooked accelerant of human performance. Recognition, ironically, has been analyzed since the beginning of time under a microscope—under the lens of the human psyche. The accolades, thanks, praise, gratitude and Carrots we've received in our own lives has been a conscious or subconscious driving force of our performance. Dig deep enough into our memories and we can still feel the biological response to certain recognition instances we experienced as children, teens, new employees, or seasoned veterans. Those biological responses are not new to today's workplace or classrooms. Recognition has accelerated human performance since the beginning of time.

Go ahead, you can trace recognition practices back to early civilizations—we didn't invent it (C'mon, we're just a couple of guys who toss stuffed carrots at executives). It is truly a staple of leadership amongst the world's most prominent, inspiring, captivating, and memorable leaders. Those who recognize the actions, attitudes, efforts, and attributes of others rise to become our leaders, roll models and mentors. Recognition not only advances success, but it also leads men, women, teams, companies, cultures, and complete civilizations through dire crisis. And, let's face it, many companies are currently facing dire crisis. So, do we buckle down on the people around us? Do we instill fear, doubt, and anxiety? Or do we look to the leaders who proved that recognition—of human actions, achievements, efforts, attitudes and attributes—not only accelerates human performance, but also creates a legacy.

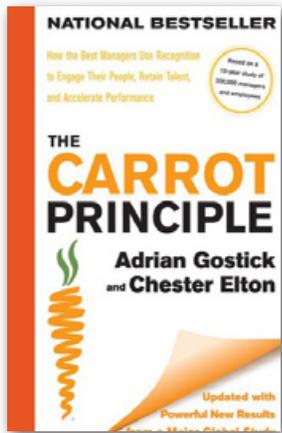
Legendary world leaders who have practiced extraordinary recognition are still studied for their abilities to influence human behavior today—people like Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Gandhi, Henry Ford, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Princess Diana, Mother Theresa, and others. All of these people led and still lead, sometimes decades after their death, masses of people. They've touched the squishy part of human behavior and performance called feelings. And, if we could figure out why corporate America is so terrified to acknowledge the emotional side of business, we guarantee we'd analyze that fear under a microscope—so more businesses, managers, parents, and teachers could witness human acceleration at its finest.

Until then, we'll just keep training companies and managers how to properly recognize. And, of course, we'll keep throwing stuffed Carrots at people—because a perfect spiral, aimed directly at the forehead, has proven to create an immediate change in perspective and almost instantaneous results.

Those who recognize the actions, attitudes, efforts, and attributes of others rise to become our leaders, role models and mentors.

ANALYSIS #5—Now

“You” can learn about “Them,” study “It,” and question “Us.” But, regardless of the information presented here, the truest test to the validity of purpose-based recognition as a human accelerator is, in fact, a test. Use the five criteria mentioned earlier. Pick a person. Recognize. Hand out a Carrot. We just gave you the fuel. See what happens now. 🍯



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Gostick and Elton's [*The Carrot Principle*](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton are the *New York Times* bestselling coauthors of *The Carrot Principle: How the Best Managers Use Recognition to Engage Their People, Retain Talent, and Accelerate Performance*, now published in a new and revised edition. Often referred to as “The Carrot Guys”, Adrian and Chester travel the world speaking to executive leadership teams, entire companies, and conference audiences. Renowned for their high-energy, and no-holds barred presentations Gostick and Elton have become recognized as the leading authorities on employee recognition—communicating the vital role, and bottom-line benefits recognition can have on an organization. Learn more at adriangostick.com and chesterelton.com.

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