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Applause! Applause!

Recognize behaviors you want to see more often

By Joan Richardson

“Super Pats” are the highlight of weekly faculty meetings at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. The “Super Pats” recognize exemplary actions by any staff member. The principal or another staff member introduces the “Super Pat” celebration by telling a story about each recipient, building to a climax when the individual’s name is announced. Then each recipient receives a plaque to commemorate the “Super Pat,” so named as a play on the phrase “pat on the back” and the school’s nickname, the Patriots.

Supt. Rick DuFour introduced “Super Pats” in the mid-1980s when he was high school principal as a way to call attention to behaviors that were in line with the school’s vision and the improvement plan for achieving that vision. Since then, over 500 “Super Pats” have been given out at the high school.

For example, the sophomore English teaching team received a “Super Pat” for deciding to offer support to struggling students in regular English classes rather than moving them into remedial classes. The school honored a math teacher who agreed to enroll sophomores in Advanced Place-

ment math classes at a time when only seniors could take those classes. Other teachers have been recognized for confronting students who were behaving inappropriately at athletic events.

“It’s anything that is consistent with our vision statement,” DuFour said.

In their book *Corporate Cultures*, Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy say celebrations are to the culture of a school “what the movie is to the script, the concert is to the score, and the dance is to values that are difficult to express in any other way.”

In other words, celebrations are the public demonstrations of what educators value in their schools.

Tom Peters, who writes and consults with corporations about becoming more effective, said that successful companies “celebrate what you want to see more of.” Peters believes that celebrating specific actions of individuals is the best way to motivate people to strive higher in order to get better results.

Celebrations recognize that the journey is as important as the destination, said Kathryn Blumsack, NSDC president and head of the school improvement training unit for the Montgomery County (Maryland) school district. Celebrations also add vibrancy to a school or district. They con-

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Celebration!



Applaud behaviors you want to see more often

Making celebrations work for your school

- ★ Recognize the behavior, not the individual.
- ★ Tell a story that describes how the behavior affects the team, program, students, etc.
- ★ Create rewards that will be valued by recipients.
- ★ Sincerity is crucial to the success of any recognition program.
- ★ The more immediate, the greater the perceived value.
- ★ Be selective. Don't hand out blanket awards. Don't give awards just for the sake of giving an award.
- ★ Catch people doing something right.
- ★ Recognize progress as well as accomplishment.
- ★ Be thoughtful in deciding where, when, and how to acknowledge someone. Respect individuals who would be embarrassed by public displays.
- ★ Have fun connecting a tangible item to a behavior. For example, giving gummy worms to the person who always gets to the early morning meetings.
- ★ Commemorate events both great and small, extraordinary and routine, personal and professional. Celebrate the beginning and ending of the school year, birthdays, anniversaries, retirements, etc.
- ★ Celebrate failures. Send a message that everyone can learn from a mistake.

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tribute to a community of people who know, trust, enjoy, and respect each other.

"It's taking the moments we have in this life, whether personal or professional, and finding reasons to enjoy the significance of those moments, whether they're good moments or tough moments," she said.

Blumsack believes in rewards, great and small. Although the rewards in her school district often come with a humorous twist, there is always an underlying serious message.

Take the Golden Plunger Award in which a toilet plunger was spray painted gold and given ceremoniously to a staff member. The reason? To reward the risk-taking staff member for plunging into an assignment.

Or the Juan Valdez Award, given to a thoughtful staff member who routinely made coffee for others in the office.

Or the Bungee Cord Award which was given to a teacher who agreed to be videotaped while teaching so others could learn from her.

Mike Schmoker, author of *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement*, believes educators "grossly underestimate the power of little acknowledgements."

"In my experience, it's a powerful component of school improvement," Schmoker said.

"Leaders nourish the dream by keeping each person fully aware of an organization's purpose and goals. Individuals also need to know that, without a doubt, their efforts contribute meaningfully to the purpose and goals. By providing brief but regular occasions to observe, recognize, celebrate, and reward meaningful accomplishments, leaders can create a field of dreams where progress and appreciation prevail," Schmoker writes in *Results* (ASCD, 1996).

Although researchers have verified the value of celebration in schools, many educators remain reluctant to embrace the ceremonies and awards. Sometimes, they call such tokens silly and embarrassing; other times, they're cynical that such rewards are merely political honors aimed at insiders.

DuFour's experience with celebration has turned out well, but he says "Super Pats" weren't automatically accepted.

"It's fair to say that the initial reaction was very cool. The first people probably took the plaques and stuck them in a drawer. By and large, there were people who felt it was okay to give general, generic praise to the faculty. It was okay to praise someone quietly, confidentially. But it was not okay to single out individuals for recognition in a public way," DuFour said.

Now, it's an accepted part of the school culture, he said. DuFour said he knew a major hurdle had been cleared when teachers began nominating their colleagues for "Super Pats" and when teachers began hanging the plaques in their rooms.

What won over his staff, he said, was sustaining the ritual over time and making a conscious effort to have lots of winners.

"We weren't trying to make this exclusionary. In some months, we gave 25 and 30 awards. When they realized it wasn't just the elite core, then it was okay," he said.

Using celebrations appropriately is one of the most powerful shapers of culture, DuFour said.

"People can't aspire to general terms like 'excellence.' But they can aspire to be like someone. When you're holding up examples of people going above and beyond the call and you're doing this at meeting after meeting, you begin to redefine the norm of what's appropriate behavior in their school," he said.



What's your celebration IQ?

Read each statement below and rate yourself on how frequently you use celebrations to recognize the efforts of staff members for each of the following:

	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
1. Completing an assigned task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Working on a project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Taking risks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Improving morale.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Helping others achieve their goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Sharing expertise with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Initiating a new project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Consistently doing a good job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Being a supportive team member.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Taking on a difficult job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Completing an extra-long project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Learning a new skill.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Scoring: Give yourself 1 point for each “rarely,” 2 points for each “sometimes,” and 3 points for each “frequently.”

SCORE: _____



Head of the class: 25-36



Middle of the room: 13-24



Need improvement: 1-12

Source: National Staff Development Council, *First School Team Conference*, 1996.

April/May 1998

*Celebrations weave
our hearts and souls
into a shared
destiny. People come
together to celebrate
beginnings and
endings, triumphs
and tragedies.
— Lee Bolman
and Terrence Deal,
“Leading with Soul:
An Uncommon Journey
of Spirit”*



Celebration brainstorming

Learn the art of encouragement. We can't always be among the heroes...someone needs to sit on the curb and clap.

– Melissa Woods,
“Thoughts on a Quality Work Culture”

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: Participants will hear and discuss the rationale for celebrations and recognition.

TIME: First of two meetings, 30 minutes each.

SUPPLIES: Varies. Tables for small-group seatings .

PREPARATION: About a week before the first meeting, provide a copy of the lead article in this issue to meeting participants. Ask them to read the article and relevant material in at least one related source item from the resource list in this issue (*See Page 7*).

On the meeting day, arrange the room to invite free discussion. The atmosphere should be informal and relaxed. Arrange small groups of individuals from across grades and subject areas.

Directions

1. Tell participants they are going to discuss the importance of stopping periodically to congratulate each other for a job well done. Tell them the goal of the meeting is to structure celebrations and recognitions into the school year.
2. Initiate discussion by saying something like this: “I’m sure all of you have memories of special times when you were recognized for your work — and because of the person who recognized you or because of the timing of the recognition, it had tremendous impact.” Then, share your favorite celebration or recognition.
3. Ask participants to take a few moments to reflect on one of those special memories. Allow one minute for this.
4. At the end of the minute, invite participants to share their memories with others at their tables. Allow two to three minutes for this.
5. At the end of that time, pose this question: “If you could plan a celebration or recognition for all of us this year, what would it celebrate? When would it occur?” Allow a few minutes for each group to brainstorm.
6. Directions for the second meeting are on Page 5.



Planning celebrations

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: Participants will hear and discuss the rationale for celebrations and recognition.

TIME: 30 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Varies. Tables for small-group seatings.

PREPARATION: Form groups according to the existing team structure — or grades, subjects, study focus, whatever is appropriate for this group. Seat each group together at a small table.

Directions

1. Ask someone besides the facilitator to lead this meeting. Ask the leader to begin with a testimonial about a special celebration or recognition they experienced.
2. Using the celebration chart on Page 6, identify the goals your group is trying to reach and how you will know when your team/school has reached that goal.
3. Then, design a celebration that will recognize when your team/school has reached each goal.
4. Coordinate the dates of the celebrations with other events in your school by marking the celebration dates on your school's master calendar.
5. Assign someone to coordinate each celebration.
6. Refer back to the celebration chart during the year to doublecheck your progress.

I think our story

proves there's

absolutely no limit to

what plain, ordinary

working people can

accomplish if they're

given the opportunity

and the encouragement

to do their best.

– Sam Walton,

Founder, Wal-Mart





Celebration chart

Goal

*Celebrate what
you want to see
more of.*

– Tom Peters

*What behaviors will demonstrate
that we are making progress toward this goal?*

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

*How should we recognize/celebrate individuals
who demonstrate each of these behaviors?*

- Behavior #1. _____
- Behavior #2. _____
- Behavior #3. _____

*I can live for two
months on one
good compliment.*

– Mark Twain

When did you recognize this behavior?

- Behavior #1. _____
- Behavior #2. _____
- Behavior #3. _____

*When the overall goal is reached, how will you
celebrate this milestone achievement?*



Learning to Celebrate!

- ❑ **The Art and Joy of Celebrating** by the School Improvement Training Unit of the Montgomery County Public Schools. A “starter” kit of resources and ideas for introducing celebration into your schools. Price: \$5 plus shipping and handling. Fax your order to (301) 479-3452.
- ❑ **Bringing Out the Best in Teachers: What Effective Principals Do** by Joseph Blase and Peggy Kirby. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1991. Reports on a study of 800 teachers and the value of praise in motivating them to perform better. Stock # 08039-601-07. Price: \$18.95. Order (805) 499-9774 or fax (805) 499-0871.
- ❑ **CARE Packages for the Workplace** by Barbara Glanz. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996. Filled with hundreds of happiness and morale-boosting suggestions. Check your local bookstore or library for a copy.
- ❑ **Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life** by Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1982. Puts celebrations and ceremonies in the larger context of reforming the culture of an organization. Check your local bookstore or public library for a copy.
- ❑ **“Keeping Your School Improvement Plan on Track”** by Stephanie Hirsh. *School Team Innovator*, April 1997. Explains strategies for maintaining momentum in your school improvement efforts, including the importance of celebrating accomplishments. Available in the NSDC Online Library at www.nsd.c.org/library.
- ❑ **The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations** by James Kouzes and Barry Posner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995. Fosters the idea that caring about employees is the way to achieve positive change in any organization. Excellent chapter on the role of celebrations and cheerleading. Stock #KOULEAE. Price: \$20. Order (800)956-7739 or fax (800) 605-2665.
- ❑ **1,001 Ways to Energize Employees** by Bob Nelson and **1,001 Ways to Reward Employees** by Bob Nelson. Both books are practical handbooks that are chock full of ideas for thanking and motivating employees. Nelson also publishes a monthly newsletter, *Rewarding Employees*. For more information or to order any books or products, contact Nelson Motivation Inc., P.O. Box 500872, San Diego, CA 92150-9973, 619-673-0690, fax 619-673-9031 or e-mail BobRewards@aol.com.
- ❑ **One-Minute Manager** and **Putting the One-Minute Manager to Work**, both by Ken Blanchard. New York: Wm. Morrow & Co., 1982. Two of the earliest books about the value of praising employees and offering suggestions on how to do it effectively. Check your local bookstore or public library for copies.
- ❑ **School Improvement Planning Manual** by Stephanie Hirsh and Mike Murphy. Oxford, Ohio: NSDC, 1992. Comprehensive step-by-step guide to develop and implement school improvement planning. Includes chapter on maintaining momentum. NSDC Stock # B8. Price: \$80, non-members; \$64, members. Phone (513) 523-6029.

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TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS STAFF

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Seize the opportunity to celebrate

Ask Dr. Developer



Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)

Q *I'm troubled by this idea of celebrating in schools. What do we have to celebrate anyway? We're all working like crazy and we know that many, many children still aren't learning at high levels. Why reward ourselves when we clearly have so much work yet to do?*

A We don't need to put off our celebrations until we're perfect anymore than children need to master Shakespeare before they can proclaim themselves readers.

Improving schools is hard work that takes a long time. When you consider that it takes three to five years for any reform to take root, I think we need to search for ways to encourage people to keep at it or we'll all burn out before we get where we ultimately want to be.

Teachers understand the value of recognizing the small, incremental achievements of their students. Yet we are reluctant to be equally generous in praising the efforts of our adult colleagues.

Celebrating small achievements takes us a step towards creating schools that are communities of learners, both children and adults. And all learners need to be praised when they make progress and encouraged to continue moving forward.

Schools may not be where they want to be but, when they've been making sincere, concerted efforts to achieve significant learning goals for students, they should be proud to acknowledge that they are not where they were.

Finally, if you promote the concept of continuous improvement, you must accept that we are never finished getting better. Once we reach our first goal, it's time for us to take stock of where we are and plot our next course of action. Inherent in that concept is the belief that each of us and every organization must continue to improve or we will stagnate.

For me, I say *carpe diem*. Seize the day and be proud to celebrate the progress in our schools!

Send your questions to Dr. Developer, 1128 Nottingham Rd., Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230.

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