# Giving Credit Where Credit is Due

**Category** Professional Series **Date** December 14, 2009

**O**ne of the major challenges that businesses face is the issue of employee turnover—that is, the loss and replacement cycle of employees. A high employee turnover rate always implies significant cost to an organization. Such cost can be measured in monetary terms as well as intellectual terms. There are certainly several reasons that account for a high employee turnover in many organizations. Such reasons can be grouped into two broad categories: (i) discrete reasons and (ii) cumulative reasons.

**D**iscrete reasons refer to those underlying issues that stand (largely) alone. Such issues usually span a relatively short period of time. For example, an employee who is a victim of sexual harassment may decide to leave an organization if she (or he) feels nothing adequate has been done in response to the alleged abuse. Also, discrete reasons are typically unforeseen until they become known. And so, they are handled on a case-by-case basis.

**C**umulative reasons, on the other hand, refer to those underlying issues that build up gradually over time. As they build up, they become compounded. The longer they compound, the more difficult they are to mitigate. This category of reasons is usually detectable—because warning flags exist for a period of time well before a turnover occurs. One such reason (among a body of cumulative reasons) is the topic of this article. It deals with an employee supervisor or manager not giving credit to a subordinate where credit is due (or credit has been earned). Instead, a supervisor or a manager takes full or partial credit for the accomplishment or great idea of a subordinate.

**T**he failure to give credit to a subordinate, in or without their presence, will not lead the subordinate to leave an organization; however, a continuous pattern of such behavior will build a psychological barrier in the mind of the subordinate employee. Over time, this psychological barrier may reach a threshold that ultimately "breaks the camel's back".

**T**here are three key benefits for a supervisor or a manager to cultivate a work habit of giving credit to a subordinate for an accomplishment or for a great idea, where the credit is indeed due. The first benefit is focused on the subordinate employee, the second is focused on the larger group (or organization), while the third is focused on the supervisor or manager.

**T**he first benefit is the acknowledgement of the positive contribution of the subordinate employee. Studies have shown that one of the things employees desire the most in any work environment is to be appreciated for their work. When a supervisor or manager gives credit where credit is due, he or she does precisely this—acknowledges the positive contribution of the subordinate employee.

**T**he second benefit is the communication of a very positive message. In giving credit where credit is earned, a supervisor or manager communicates a very powerful and positive message to the rest of the team or group. This message is one of fairness and it fosters a workplace culture of respect. The first of the **Top Ten Laws of Respect in the Workplace** states that "*Respect in the workplace is all about valuation, worth and fairness.*"

**T**he third benefit is one of character—personal character of a supervisor or manager. When credit is given where due, this action reveals an aspect of the personal character of a supervisor or manager. This action leaves a positive psychological mark in the minds of the rest of the employees—the same employees who will be asked to give more of their time, to spend more energy, and quite often to wait a bit longer to receive a financial bonus or reward.

**The Benefits of Giving Credit**

**When you give credit where credit is due (in a work environment), three things happen:**

1. **You acknowledge the positive contribution of another**
2. **You communicate a positive message—of fairness—to the rest of your team or group**
3. **You reveal a positive aspect of your personal character**

**O**n the other hand, the consequences of a habit of taking credit for the accomplishments and ideas of subordinate employees are quite contrary to the benefits—far worse. Such consequences are like a ticking time bomb waiting for the worse possible moment to explode. And when the explosion occurs, valuable employees are lost leading to the continued cycle of employee turnover. Ultimately and over the long term, customers end up paying the price!

## About the Author

Niyi Taiwo is the founder of EKTIMIS and the lead editor for the EKTIMIS eLibrary articles. He is the author of several books, including the EKTIMIS Top Ten Laws of Respect series. He is a continuous improvement expert with over 21 years of industry experience – operational, management and consulting. He has been studying the topic of respect since 2004. He holds an undergraduate degree from WPI and a master's degree from RPI. He is a certified Lean Expert and an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt.