

The Wisdom Orchard

Leadership Development Worksheets



Do the People Around You Know They Matter?

The Heart of the Harvest—Let People Know They Mattered

Most leaders think they recognize their people more than they do. The data is consistent and humbling: what feels like frequent, meaningful recognition to the leader is experienced as rare and generic by the team. This worksheet is about closing that gap — not with programs, but with the discipline of paying attention.

The Gap You May Not Know You Have

Most leaders think they acknowledge their team far more than their staff actually feels. This divide rarely stems from poor motives; rather, it grows from a lack of regularity, concrete detail, and the personal commitment to follow through on what we observe.

The Recognition Gap: Leaders consistently overrate their own recognition behaviors.

Leaders may believe they are recognizing people often enough, while the people around them experience something very different. What matters is not how often we think we show appreciation, but whether others actually feel seen and valued.

Specific Recognition Has More Impact: Recognition that isn't specific doesn't register.

"Good job" and "great work" are processed by the brain as noise after the first few repetitions. What people remember — and what actually motivates — is recognition tied to a specific behavior and its real impact.

Silence Creates Uncertainty: Infrequent recognition creates a scarcity that undermines culture.

When people go weeks without hearing what they're doing well, they fill the silence with uncertainty. Am I on track? Does my work matter? Does anyone notice? Silence reads as ambivalence.

The practical question is simple: do the people around you regularly know that their contribution was seen, understood, and valued?

Part One: The Distinction That Changes Everything — Kind, Not Nice

Before we talk about recognition, we need to name a trap most leaders fall into: confusing kindness with niceness. They are not the same thing, and mistaking one for the other undermines both recognition and development.

Kim Scott's Radical Candor Framework

Ruinous Empathy: caring about someone's feelings so much that you withhold the truth they need. This feels kind. It isn't — it leaves people without information they need to grow.

Manipulative Insincerity: praise that isn't real, given to avoid conflict or be liked. People sense it immediately and it erodes trust.

Obnoxious Aggression: honest but delivered without care. It damages the relationship and people shut down.

Radical Candor: caring deeply about the person AND telling them the truth. Specific praise when they earn it. Honest redirection when they need it. This is the zone.

The Emotional Intelligence Lens (Goleman)

Self-awareness: Do you know how your recognition (or lack of it) is landing? Do you know your default pattern — too much praise, too little, or praise that's generic?

Empathy: Do you know what each person on your team needs to feel valued? One person wants public recognition. Another finds it mortifying. One needs to hear the 'why' behind the praise. Another just needs it to be timely.

Relationship management: Recognition is not a transaction. It's how you build the relationship that allows honest feedback to land as investment rather than criticism.

Kind feedback tells people what they need to hear, delivered in a way they can receive it. Nice feedback tells people what makes them feel good in the moment. The difference is whether you're serving them or serving your own discomfort.

STEP 1 — Where do you tend to land on the Radical Candor grid? Be honest.

My default pattern in recognition and feedback (and what I notice about it):

A time recently when I was 'nice' instead of 'kind' — and what it cost:

Part Two: The Recognition Frequency Audit

This is the uncomfortable part. Do it anyway.

STEP 2 — For each person on your team, complete the table below. Be specific — vague answers here mean vague recognition out there.

(If you can't remember the last time, or you can't describe what you recognized, that's the data.)

Team member	Last time I recognized them specifically	What I recognized (be specific)	How they prefer to be recognized

Now look at the table. Ask yourself:

- Is anyone missing — someone you haven't recognized in more than two weeks?
- Are your recognitions specific, or do they repeat the same general phrases?
- Do you actually know how each person prefers to be recognized? Or are you guessing — or doing it the way you'd want it?

What this audit is telling me:

Part Three: What Recognition Actually Sounds Like

Most leaders know they should recognize people more specifically. Fewer have practiced doing it well. The table below contrasts recognition that lands with recognition that doesn't — not because the intent is different, but because the delivery is.

Generic (doesn't land)	Specific (lands and sticks)
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"Great job on that presentation."	"The way you opened with the client's specific concern — before showing any data — reframed the whole conversation. That's a real skill and I want you to know I noticed."
"You've been working really hard lately."	"I've seen you staying late three nights this week to make sure the handoff is clean for the new team. That kind of ownership is exactly what holds this team together."
"Thanks for covering."	"I know that wasn't your work and you stepped in without being asked. That's the kind of judgment that makes people trust you, and it didn't go unnoticed."
"You're such a great team player."	"When Maya was stuck on the data analysis, you stopped what you were doing and spent an hour helping her figure it out. That's what it means to be on a team — and it showed."

Part Four: Build a Recognition Moment Right Now

Don't leave this worksheet without using it. Think of someone on your team who has done something worth recognizing in the last two weeks. Use the builder below to craft it — and then deliver it within 48 hours.

Build a Recognition Moment	
Who: <i>Name the specific person</i>	
What they did: <i>Describe the behavior or contribution — not the outcome, the action</i>	
Why it mattered: <i>Connect it to the team, the work, or the people you serve</i>	
How it reflects our values: <i>Name the value it demonstrates</i>	
How I'll deliver it: <i>In person? Written? Public? Private? What fits this person?</i>	
When: <i>Within 48 hours of the moment, if possible</i>	

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Part Five: Celebrating the Team, Not Just Individuals

Individual recognition matters deeply. So does the experience of being part of something that's winning together. Team celebration is how you build collective identity — the sense that we're not just people who work near each other, but people who are accomplishing something real together.

STEP 3 — Think about the last 60 days. What has your team achieved — large or small — that deserved to be named and celebrated together?

What we accomplished	How (or whether) we marked it together

What's the most meaningful way I could celebrate my team together in the next 30 days?

Celebration doesn't require a budget. It requires attention. The most powerful team celebrations are the ones where the leader took the time to name what was accomplished, connect it to what it means, and say it out loud in front of the people who did the work.
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Part Six: Making Recognition a Habit, Not an Event

Recognition that happens only when a leader remembers is too infrequent to have cultural impact. The goal is to build a rhythm — a reliable cadence that means people know they'll be seen, regularly and specifically.

Recognition habit	What this looks like in practice	I'll start this (date)
Weekly: one specific recognition	Before Friday, name one thing one person did well this week. Say it out loud or write it. Make it specific.	

In 1:1s: name one strength you observed	Open every 1:1 by naming one specific thing you noticed them do well since you last met. Not generic. Not a warm-up. Real.	
Catch them doing it right	When you see a value being lived out in real time, say something within the hour. Brief is fine. Timing is everything.	
End-of-project acknowledgment	When a project closes, name what each person contributed — not just the outcome, the specific way they showed up.	

Every tree in an orchard needs light and water. Withhold either and it will survive — but it won't flourish. Recognition is the light and water of a team. It doesn't cost money. It costs attention. And the return — in engagement, in loyalty, in the quality of what people bring to their work — compounds every season you invest it.

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Name: _____ Date: _____ Role: _____