

# **B.R.A.G.: A Simple, Repeatable Recognition System for Reinforcing Service Excellence at The Springs**

## **A Practical Recognition Framework, with a Real-World Example of Service Excellence**

This paper is designed for department leaders at The Springs and can be adapted by any private club or community association.

### **Executive Summary**

Recognition is one of the most effective tools leaders can use to strengthen culture, reinforce service standards, and increase employee engagement. Yet many organizations struggle to make recognition consistent, timely, and meaningful.

The B.R.A.G. Program (Because we Recognize and Appreciate Greatness) at The Springs Community Association addresses this gap through a simple, repeatable process. Managers identify exceptional performance, document it on a B.R.A.G. card, and recognize the employee through specific praise, public visibility, and a tangible reward.

This white paper outlines the B.R.A.G. framework, explains why public recognition reinforces service excellence, and includes a real-world case study demonstrating how small moments of creativity can create lasting guest memories and meaningful employee pride.

### **Why Recognition Programs Matter**

In private clubs and community associations, service is not simply the product. Service is the experience, and the experience is created by people. When employees feel seen, valued, and appreciated, they bring more energy to their work and build stronger connections with members and guests.

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Recognition is also one of the most effective ways to reinforce standards because it highlights the behaviors leaders want repeated.

If leadership wants to encourage:

- thoughtful problem solving
- proactive hospitality
- ownership and pride
- teamwork and creativity
- professionalism under pressure

Then leadership must intentionally identify and celebrate moments when those behaviors appear.

The B.R.A.G. Program exists to capture those moments and turn them into culture.

## **Recognition as Culture Reinforcement**

**Recognition is not only appreciation. It is communication.**

It tells employees:

- *We notice.*
- *Your effort matters.*
- *This is what excellence looks like here.*

## **What the B.R.A.G. Program Is**

The **B.R.A.G. Program** is a structured recognition system designed to celebrate employees who go above and beyond expectations.

The program is intentionally simple:

Employees who perform exceptional acts should be recognized quickly, publicly, and meaningfully.

The B.R.A.G. flyer states:

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- This is for employees who go above and beyond expectations.
- It is a new program to recognize employees who are performing exceptional acts.
- If you receive a B.R.A.G. card, bring it to HR and choose a \$25 gift card.
- A photo will be taken and posted in the Clubhouse employee lunchroom.

At its best, B.R.A.G. is not only a reward program. It is a culture system.

## **Callout: Why B.R.A.G. Works**

B.R.A.G. succeeds because it creates a process that is:

- easy for managers to use
- immediate for employees to feel
- visible to the team
- repeatable across departments

## **The Recognition Framework (How B.R.A.G. Works)**

One of the strengths of B.R.A.G. is that it removes ambiguity. Employees do not have to wonder if their effort will be noticed. Managers do not have to overthink how to recognize someone. The process is clear and consistent.

### **Step 1: Identify a Moment Worth Recognizing**

Managers and supervisors are encouraged to look for behaviors such as:

- going beyond job duties to solve a member or guest issue
- demonstrating creativity or initiative
- stepping in to help others without being asked
- turning an ordinary interaction into a memorable experience
- staying professional under pressure

### **Step 2: Write the B.R.A.G. Card**

The card should include:

- employee name

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- date
- what they did
- why it mattered
- the impact on the member, guest, or team

This ensures recognition is specific, detailed, and personal.

### **Step 3: Present the Card**

Presentation matters. Recognition should be delivered intentionally and with pride. Ideally, managers recognize employees:

- in the moment
- in front of peers when appropriate
- with a personal thank you
- in a way that reinforces the recognition is earned, not routine

### **Step 4: The Employee Brings the Card to HR**

The employee brings the B.R.A.G. card to HR to:

- select a \$25 gift card
- take a photo
- have the recognition posted in the employee lunchroom

This closes the loop and reinforces recognition as part of the organization's standard rhythm, not a one-time event.

## **The Power of Specific Recognition**

General praise is forgettable. Specific recognition builds confidence and culture.

Instead of:

**“Great job today.”**

B.R.A.G. reinforces:

**“Here is what you did, why it mattered, and what it says about your professionalism.”**

## **Why Public Recognition Matters**

Public recognition is important. When employees see others recognized, they learn:

- what behaviors are valued
- what “going above and beyond” looks like
- that leadership is paying attention

It also creates pride. A posted photo in the lunchroom becomes a badge of honor. Over time, the lunchroom becomes more than a break space. It becomes a visible wall of excellence, a reminder that service and professionalism are recognized and celebrated.

## **Measuring the Impact of B.R.A.G.**

B.R.A.G. is designed to be simple, but its impact can still be tracked in practical ways. Leadership should monitor whether recognition is happening consistently across departments by tracking how many B.R.A.G. cards are issued each month and whether multiple managers are actively participating. Over time, the program should also show up in culture and performance through increased employee pride, more initiative, and more “above and beyond” service moments happening without being prompted.

While not every recognition moment will appear in a survey, the member and guest experience often reflects it through verbal compliments, positive feedback, and employees being mentioned by name. Long-term, consistent recognition can also contribute to stronger retention and a more stable team, especially among high performers.

The goal of measurement is not to turn recognition into a scoreboard. It is to ensure excellence is being noticed consistently and reinforced as part of the organization’s rhythm.

Nowhere is the impact of recognition clearer than when it captures a moment that a guest will remember long after the event is over.

## **Real-World Example: B.R.A.G. in Action at the Christmas Eve Brunch**

A recognition program is only as meaningful as the moments it captures. One of the strongest examples of B.R.A.G. in action occurred during the Christmas Eve Brunch.

The Clubhouse was decorated, staff was ready, and the energy reflected the holiday spirit. The first seating began at 10:00 AM, with Santa scheduled to arrive at 10:30 AM.

At 10:00, a large family arrived early. Their reservation was not until 10:30, but they believed Santa was arriving at 10:00. We were able to seat them early, and once Santa arrived at 10:30, they happily took photos and returned to brunch.

A few minutes later, a woman and her young daughter approached. The child looked unhappy. The mother explained that they had entered another decorated room and noticed candy canes on a table. Their dining table did not have any, and she politely asked if her daughter could have one.

I said yes, and the child lit up. She returned to her table smiling, holding her candy cane.

About twenty minutes later, I had an idea to elevate the moment. I asked Sergio at the bar if he could create a fun candy cane-themed drink for a young girl, around five years old. Without hesitation, he began crafting something special.

A few minutes later, the drink was ready. It included Sprite, grenadine, and other ingredients, served in a fancy glass. Then Sergio added one final touch: a large candy cane placed directly into the drink.

A server named Sandra asked if she could deliver it. She was genuinely excited to be part of the moment. I agreed, and she delivered it with pride.

From the bar, I watched the table react. I could not see the child's face, but the mother's reaction said everything: hands raised, wide smiles, and a moment that turned into a holiday memory.

Later, the grandfather approached me before leaving and simply said:

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**“Nice touch.”**

I knew exactly what he meant.

### **The Recognition Moment**

Back in my office, I reflected on what happened. A candy cane drink is not a major operational accomplishment. It does not appear in a budget report or a strategic plan.

But it is exactly what hospitality is supposed to be.

So I filled out a B.R.A.G. card and recognized Sergio immediately. I returned to the bar, thanked him, and presented him his B.R.A.G. card in a public moment that matched the spirit of what he had created.

He was over the moon.

### **The Heart of Hospitality**

The guest will not remember the seating chart.

They will not remember the schedule.

They will remember how they felt.

B.R.A.G. helps leaders recognize the employees who create those feelings.

### **Key Takeaways**

The B.R.A.G. Program is more than a gift card. It is a system that helps leaders turn exceptional service into visible culture. It reinforces what matters, celebrates excellence, and encourages repeatable behaviors that create stronger guest experiences.

Recognition works best when it is:

- timely
- specific
- meaningful

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- consistent
- visible

The B.R.A.G. Program supports all five.

Service excellence is built through moments, not policies. Organizations that want memorable member and guest experiences must create systems that reinforce the behaviors behind those experiences.

The B.R.A.G. Program offers a simple but powerful framework that recognizes employees in real time, makes excellence visible, and strengthens culture through consistent appreciation.

When managers notice and celebrate exceptional acts, employees feel valued, standards become clearer, and hospitality becomes a shared identity.

**Implement B.R.A.G., or a version adapted to your organization, and watch small moments of excellence become your culture's defining feature.**