

Idea

When the usual awards are given to ITA employees, in addition to the customary certificate/plaque and monetary component, winners are also given either an ITA tie (male) or ITA scarf (female).

These items would have the ITA logo/brand emblazoned on them in a tasteful, understated fashion, and would be of reasonably nice quality (i.e. not polyester).

The award tie/scarfs could only be won, not purchased or otherwise acquired, and they would be only for the civil service – it is important that political appointees or contractors not be eligible for them.

Rationale

A small but visible sign of achievement. If you saw someone with an ITA tie/scarf, you would know immediately that he/she had done something significantly merit-worthy to advance the ITA mission. Wearing the item would also be a visible indication to higher-level political appointees (e.g. the Secretary, ITA Under Secretary) that the wearer is an employee of accomplishment and ability who takes pride in where he/she works.

A contribution to a strong and visible civil service culture at ITA and a representation of it to outsiders (stakeholders and foreign governments). Anything that gives employees more of a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves would have the potential to increase morale and bureau cohesion. The U.S. military does this extremely well with all the different unit insignia and regalia; service personnel all feel proud to be a part of their group.

Commentary

I think a contributing factor to ITA's low scores in the survey may be that it doesn't really have a strong civil service culture with which employees identify. The ITA culture tends to take its shape from the political leadership in place at a given time, rather than having a distinct, independent organizational culture whose work and quality is known to both employees and outsiders. A visible symbol of excellence within ITA as well as of ITA itself might help change this and promote more pride/higher morale.

The current system of awards, in addition to being underutilized, focuses mostly on monetary remuneration rather than on recognizing excellence within an organizational identity. Most of ITA's top employees chose work in the government, forgoing career opportunities in the private sector that would financially compensate them much better...so they're not in this solely for the money. Therefore, it seems the current practice of handling awards in a mostly private sector fashion (financially) might seem at some level less than totally fulfilling to people who believe in the uniqueness of their government work and specifically in ITA's mission. While the money is definitely appreciated, I think adding a small but visible signal of their success might be appreciated, might even encourage others to strive to succeed so they too can be recognized in this fashion, and will likely help build a cohesive ITA civil service culture.