



# Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar

***Your How-to Guide for Building an  
Everyday Culture of Appreciation***

**2020**



**Make 2020 the year you energize your organization with a coordinated employee recognition program that builds a fun, happy, engaged, and productive workplace!**

Here at gThankYou, we know how to hit “refresh” on workplace culture. We’re experienced at helping companies of all sizes and industries celebrate employees. We understand what goes into building a sustainable, vibrant culture of gratitude, and the importance of planning ahead to keep engagement goals on track.

Employee recognition is about so much more than end-of-the-year dinners and employee-of-the-month plaques. The most successful businesses know the importance of celebrating employees day in and day out!

## How to Use This eBook

There is no “one size fits all” approach to recognizing workers.

That’s why we’ve designed this how-to eBook. We want to inspire you to bring your engagement to a higher level and find the recognition approach that works for your organization. You know your company best!

Our how-to guide walks you through planning for seasonal engagement and a wide variety of holidays, organized by month. Throughout the calendar, you’ll also find important stats, mini case studies, “anytime recognition” ideas, and essential everyday tips for building a happier workplace through engagement and fun.

This isn’t a novel that needs to be read front to back. It is intended as a year-round reference guide — so skip ahead, go back, reread, and return to it whenever you need a little creative inspiration. This is “choose your own adventure” engagement!

## Why Now?

We live in an exciting time for HR leaders. New research into what drives employee engagement reveals there’s so much more we can be doing.

The response to innovate has been incredible, but innovations have yet to be widely adopted. Gallup’s most recent “State of the American Workplace” report, released in 2017, found that 70 percent of American workers are not engaged.

HR is in crisis mode, and change isn’t optional, the researchers concluded: “The old ways — annual reviews, forced rankings, outdated competencies — no longer achieve the intended results.”

The problem isn’t a lack of investment. Quite the opposite: Employee recognition programs are a major investment for most companies. Yet much of this investment is wasted on recognition that doesn’t work.

A study by Bersin & Associates found that 87 percent of the \$46 billion spent annually on employee recognition goes toward ineffective tenure-based recognition such as pins and

awards dinners. The spirit of these efforts is admirable, but now we know it isn’t enough.

The latest science shows employees respond better to frequent celebrations and on-the-spot, peer-to-peer, and results-based recognition. **Further, researchers have identified the important difference between recognition and appreciation.** In short: **Recognition** primarily focuses on what the company wants, and can come off as manipulative and insincere. **Appreciation** acknowledges workers as human beings and motivates them to care because their managers do.

Appreciation drives engagement, which in turn drives productivity and profitability. The impact is substantial. The Bersin study found that companies that scored in the top 20 percent for building “recognition-rich culture” had 31 percent lower voluntary turnover rates — an outcome many CEOs would pay millions to achieve! Effective recognition and appreciation don’t cost more. They’re simply smarter.

## Getting Started

With so much innovation happening in the world of HR, now is the perfect time to evaluate your employee recognition needs — whether you’re starting from scratch or looking to polish an existing program.

First, a reality check. You can’t build an engaged workforce without the basics:

- Fair pay
- Safe working conditions
- Trust in leadership
- Meaningful work
- A culture of respect
- Commitment from senior management

**THAT LAST POINT IS CRITICAL:** Management needs to believe in the power of gratitude and the financial and cultural value of engagement. Leaders are your company’s engagement role models. Your HR team can throw its resources into a recognition program, but if management doesn’t care, employees will sense the disconnect and your efforts will fall flat.





# 6 Questions to Assess Your Company's Recognition Needs

Your organization is unique. So are your recognition needs. Begin planning by asking these six key questions to assess those needs:

- 1

**Who is the target of your recognition program?**
  - A specific team
  - An office or other single location — plant, store, outlet, clinic, etc.
  - Distributed employees
  - The whole company
- 2

**How will your company's brand influence the tone and execution of engagement practices?**
- 3

**What do you want to accomplish — a month from now, a year from now, five years from now?**
- 4

**What are your metrics of success and how will you measure them?**
  - Annual survey
  - Instant or mobile-driven feedback
  - Retention rates
  - Customer satisfaction
- 5

**What is your budget?**
  - On a shoestring
  - Moderate and targeted
  - Generous and sweeping
- 6

**How does the size of your company affect your engagement approach?**

Small/Medium Company	
Benefit	Challenge
More personalized engagement activities	Even on a small scale, results still need to be tracked and measured
Ability to be more flexible, responsive	A smaller budget

Large Company	
Benefit	Challenge
Streamlined recognition program that allows employees to participate locally but be part of something bigger	Fewer chances for employees to interact personally with management
Bigger budget	Less flexibility to tailor program locally



## Ready for Takeoff!

Now comes the fun part. You've assessed your basic needs and approach, so you're ready to start playing around with ideas. It's your chance to get creative.

Creativity, incidentally, "holds a key role in the formula for employee engagement," according to [TalentCulture](#). Creativity can also be intimidating. The directive to "Get creative!" can feel like a lot of pressure. Too often we think of creativity as an innate, mystical talent bestowed on a lucky few. But creativity is actually a natural capability of every human being.

Steve Jobs famously described creativity as "just connecting things." That's why we've put together this how-to guide: to help you make the connections that spark innovation and let you create a unique, effective employee engagement program that fits your organization.



# January

## Engagement Planning for the New Year

If one of your goals for 2020 is to do more employee engagement, then good news — you’ve come to the right place! gThankYou’s Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar is chock-full of engagement, recognition, and appreciation ideas, the majority of which can be implemented at no or low cost.

**The philosophy behind our calendar is that engaged employees are employees who are recognized and appreciated routinely.** Research overwhelmingly shows that sincere appreciation makes a meaningful impression on workers — inspiring them to be more productive, satisfied, and loyal.

While the impetus behind more traditional forms of annual recognition might be sincere, the ROI isn’t there. **The most successful businesses know the importance of appreciating employees day in and day out.**

Use this calendar to inspire your employee appreciation planning this year. Share it with your team, add any other resources you find inspiring and solicit employee feedback.

Quantum Workplace has outlined some excellent **questions to ask as you create your own engagement calendar** that will help you organize your thoughts and stay on top of what’s ahead.

Download our free guide to **building workplace gratitude** for easy tactics for any workplace and take advantage of the **plethora of wonderful free resources** from the **Random Acts of Kindness Foundation**.

To get started, flip through this calendar and choose one idea to try each month. For instance, National Fun at Work Day is coming up on January 28. Get creative! What would your workplace think is fun? Host an ice cream party, board game tournament, snowman team-building contest, a movie with popcorn, “Who Am I?” game — the list is endless!

Have fun and happy planning!



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## Don’t-Miss Celebration

**NATIONAL THANK YOU MONTH** — Start a gratitude habit by writing Thank You notes.

The best Thank You notes are:

- **Handwritten.** In the digital age, a handwritten note stands out.
- **Heartfelt.** When it comes to gratitude, feelings matter.
- **Personal.** Share an observation or anecdote.
- **Specific.** Explain exactly why you’re grateful.
- **Timely.** Your “Thank You” has the most impact right away. Don’t wait!
- **Delivered in person.** If possible, deliver your letter with a handshake and big smile.

## Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**NATIONAL TAKE THE STAIRS DAY (JAN. 8)** — Take your workplace wellness goals one step at a time. Encourage employees to avoid elevators for one day, or take your team on a lunchtime lap around the building.

**NATIONAL PIE DAY (JAN. 23)** — Sharing a pie builds goodwill and brings colleagues together!

**NATIONAL FUN AT WORK DAY (JAN. 28)** — Have fun with a work-related game, or just whack a piñata!

## Build a Kinder, More Human Workplace

In today’s technology-heavy workplaces, **it’s good business to encourage positive, face-to-face human interaction.** Forbes contributor Dan Schwabel **notes** deliberate efforts at Apple, Google, and IBM to get workers into the same physical space together.

*“Companies will continue to promote their workspaces and design them to facilitate interpersonal relationships between employees,” he writes. “Leaders who encourage personal connections will have more committed, satisfied, and productive workers.”*

Not every business can afford to build Google Cafes, of course. But managers can adopt a mind-set to promote stronger connections among their employees. A Harvard Business Review article titled **“Why Do So Many Managers Forget They’re Human Beings?”** contends that true leadership comes from “our abilities to form personal and meaningful bonds with the people whom we lead.”

**The HBR authors offer four pieces of advice for leaders who want to be more effective:**

1. **Be personal.** Put yourself in employees’ shoes and imagine they are family members or friends.
2. **Be self-aware.** When you understand yourself, you are better able to understand and empathize with the people you lead, and in turn lead for their intrinsic motivation.
3. **Be selfless.** Leadership is not about you, but about the people and the organization you lead.
4. **Be compassionate.** When it comes to leadership, nothing beats compassion. It is a universal language that is understood by everyone, everywhere. Make a habit of asking one simple question whenever you engage with anyone: **How can I help this person have a better day?**

## Mini Case Study: Building a Gratitude Culture, One Card at a Time

Each year, Sheldon Yellen, CEO of billion-dollar property restoration company Belfor, sends a birthday card to each of his employees. That’s right. **He personally writes nearly 8,000 birthday greetings every year.** He’s been doing this for more than 30 years and doesn’t intend to stop. Why?

Yellen started the practice when he was hired in 1985, because he thought the personal touch could inspire people to communicate more openly. “And it worked,” he says. **To stay ahead of the curve, Yellen often travels with a stack of cards, so he can finish several dozen whenever he has free time on a flight.** Usually he’ll mention a shared experience or a conversation he’s had with an employee, so the message has more meaning.

He also writes thank you notes to acknowledge “random acts of kindness” performed in the field.

Yellen says the effort has led to a more compassionate, gracious workplace, because it makes people feel appreciated. **“It’s woven into our company culture,” he says.** The experience has taught him that gratitude yields continuing returns, and “it doesn’t have to cost a thing.”



Sheldon Yellen

## Key Stats

**Nearly 50 percent of all workers say they would leave their job for a company that was better at recognizing employees. (Globoforce)**



# February

## Make February Workplace Kindness Month

With **Random Acts of Kindness Day** on the 17th and Valentine’s Day on the 14th, February is the perfect month to focus on workplace kindness.

**Planting seeds of kindness has been shown to improve moods and productivity.** And **it’s contagious.** So share a little kindness and see how it ripples through your office. Here are some fun, easy ideas to try:

- **Spread messages of kindness.** Blanket the office with posters and notes of appreciation. Delight workers with little gifts.
- **Create a kindness wall.** Designate a blank space and supply Post-Its where employees can share the kind things others have done for them. Then take photos and share them on social media — #RAKDay #MakeKindnessTheNorm #KindnessMatters!
- **Help colleagues learn something new about each other.** Have work groups select “get to know you” questions to answer out loud. Send departments that don’t work together to lunch together and provide thought-provoking questions for them.

As Amelia Earhart once said, **“No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another.”**

You can get more material at [randomactsofkindness.org](https://randomactsofkindness.org), including the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation’s **Workplace Kindness Calendar**. They’ve also got **a ton of ideas** and **free resources such as printable posters**.

For even more ideas, try this acrostic containing 20 tips from **O.C. Tanner about random acts of kindness** in the workplace. It underscores how being kind can be simple, but isn’t always our default setting, especially when we’re at work.

And while February may be a fitting month to celebrate it, kindness is a good thing all the time. Make 2020 the year to build your kinder and happier workplace!



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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY (FEB. 17)** — The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has plenty of ideas at [randomactsofkindness.org](https://randomactsofkindness.org) for building goodwill at work and in the community. You can even nominate an employee or coworker as a “RAKtivist” and publicly recognize them for their kindness. According to the foundation, RAKtivists “live and breathe kindness, share knowledge and lead by example. You can tell where they’ve been because they leave a trail of warm-and-fuzzy feelings in their wake.”

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**SUPER BOWL MONDAY (FEB. 3)** — The game and halftime show will be on everyone’s mind the Monday after, so instead of trying to keep everyone on task, host a quick post-Super Bowl get-together. Afterward, everyone will be ready to get to work!

**VALENTINE’S DAY (FEB. 14)** — Encourage employees to celebrate Valentine’s Day by sharing compassion with coworkers or volunteering together in the community.

**PRESIDENTS’ DAY (FEB. 17)** — Take this opportunity to reflect on the qualities that define truly great leaders. Countless inspirational quotes from U.S. commanders-in-chief are just a web search away and easy to share with your team — like this one, courtesy of Harry S. Truman: “It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

## Why We Love Random Acts of Kindness in the Workplace

Writer Anne Herbert coined the phrase “random acts of kindness” in the early 1980s when she scribbled on a restaurant placemat, “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty.”

Here’s why we love performing random acts of kindness — on Random Acts of Kindness Day (Feb. 17) or anytime:

1. **It breaks up routine.** An unexpected kind gesture lifts us out of our self-focus.
2. **It has awesome ROI.** A simple smile has the power to spark a conversation that may lead to trading ideas or forging a priceless partnership.
3. **It’s healthy.** Random acts of kindness don’t just benefit the receiver — they also boost the giver’s mental and physical health. A beaming smile is a positive indicator of longevity, as Ron Gutman discusses in his TED Talk “**The Hidden Power of Smiling.**”
4. **It’s contagious.** Practicing random kindness has a **domino effect**. Even witnessing acts of kindness can set off waves of goodwill.
5. **It’s teachable.** Our willingness to help strangers is flexible and shaped by small changes in perception. A researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison observed alterations in brain function in study participants after just seven hours of **compassion training** — a “remarkable” turnaround, he said.

### Key Stats

82 percent of employees think they are not recognized for their work as often as they deserve to be. (Bamboo HR)



### Mini Case Study: Why Send Flowers? Send a Snuggle Instead!

Monroe County Humane Association in Indiana raises money through its **“Send a Snuggle Day” for Random Acts of Kindness Week**. For the annual event, which began in 2014, the public can donate money to send “animal ambassadors” to spread a little cheer and kindness to a person or team of their choosing.

The snuggly emissaries have included dogs, kittens, rabbits, goats, a miniature horse, and an albino snake. (No one ever sends the snake, MCHA executive director Rebecca Warren notes.) Volunteers accompany the animals into banks, schools, and other workplaces.

Warren told the Indiana Daily Student that **when Send a Snuggle visits a workplace**, it’s usually not just one person who reaps the benefits.

“It becomes an entire facility response. Everyone is so excited when they see the animal. Everyone’s taking pictures and getting down on the floor. At least three people cry,” Warren said. “Send a Snuggle is the best day of the year to do my job. It’s wonderful to see people get so excited and emotional about it.”



**SEND A Snuggle**  
for RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY



# March

## How a Yale Class Can Help Make Employees Happier

Psychology professor Laurie Santos specializes in evolution and animal cognition, but after living among undergrads when she became head of Yale’s Silliman College, she realized just how stressed out and depressed they were. Reviewing surveys from the **National College Health Assessment**, she learned that Yale students’ issues were similar to those of their peers across the country, who report **high and increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness**.

So Santos designed a course to convey not just the science behind **positive psychology** research, but also how putting it into practice could have a profound impact on students’ quality of life. Since then, **“Psychology and the Good Life”** has drawn overwhelming interest, with 1 in 4 students taking it and major news media covering it.

Santos shared the main takeaways in an Aspen Ideas Festival lecture (available on **YouTube** and as a **podcast**). We highly recommend checking it out. She presents the science in an accessible way and offers practical information, like:

- Most college students report getting only 4-5 hours of sleep. We all need more than that!
- Even just 30 minutes of mild cardio every day can have the impact of a Zoloft prescription if you’re depressed.
- Connecting with others makes you happier — even if you think you prefer solitude.
- Keep a gratitude journal and write Thank You notes.

Consider giving your employees an hour off with instructions to watch or listen to Santos’s lecture — or maybe two, so they won’t feel rushed. **Then look for practical ways for employees to apply her knowledge regularly**, and look forward to a happier workplace!



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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS (MARCH 20)** — Plan participatory activities that focus on *creating* happiness, not just *being* happy. And say “Thank You”! Not only will you make someone’s day, but there’s a good chance the recipient will feel empowered to make someone else’s day, too. A chain reaction of gratitude is *happiness in action*!

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DAY (MARCH 6)** — Celebrate with a fun activity and message of gratitude, or use the occasion to kick off a new appreciation program.

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF AWESOMENESS (MARCH 10)** — Show your inner awesomeness and honor the everyday awesomeness of your employees, coworkers, and company! Remember Neil Pasricha’s **“The 3 A’s of Awesome”**: **Attitude, Awareness and Authenticity**.

**PI DAY (MARCH 14)** — Enjoy slices of pie together to celebrate the fascinating and mysterious mathematical constant known as *pi*, or 3.14159..., the never-ending number that results from calculating the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter. When it comes to gratitude, it turns out you actually *can* have your pie and eat it, too!



## Make Employee Appreciation a Priority (It Matters!)

Celebrations in the workplace are transformative because they help us “deal constructively with the intangible dynamics within us and within groups,” business consultant Francis Cholle says.

Make a celebration of employee appreciation! Regular workplace celebrations that mark holidays or company-specific achievements “imply a certain level of ceremony and require time, but they are profoundly efficient in both the short and the long term,” Cholle writes in his LinkedIn post **“The Importance of Rituals in the Workplace.”**

Sharing appreciation feels great and spreads positivity, too. Just as celebrating gratitude builds organizational health, gratitude is good for individual mental and physical health. Studies show again and again that sharing and receiving gratitude makes us more energetic, resilient, and happy.

### Here are last-minute ideas for celebrating Employee Appreciation Day (March 6):

- Walk around the office and personally thank each employee.
- Distribute bags of gold chocolate coins or fortune cookies with Thank You messages.
- Highlight a recent “win” for the team and celebrate it.
- Bring in breakfast or host an ice cream social.
- Invite fun, healthy, or useful services into the workplace — hire on-site car washers, a staffed juice bar, or a team of massage therapists to give five-minute chair massages.

### Key Stats

**Happier people work harder. In a series of lab experiments at the University of Warwick, happiness correlated with a 12 percent increase in productivity. Lower happiness among study participants was systematically associated with lower productivity.**



## Resources for You: Discover the Science of Happiness

If you’re looking for something more in-depth and immersive than a recorded lecture, Yale professor Dr. Laurie Santos offers a free online version of her class through Coursera. **“The Science of Well Being”** is one of the website’s most popular courses, drawing more than 135,000 students from 168 countries.

(If you can’t commit but could benefit from an overview, a writer at The Cut took the course and shared this **cheat sheet to happiness**.)

Also: UC Berkeley was the first to offer a massive open online course on positive psychology. **“The Science of Happiness”** teaches science-based principles and practices for a happy, meaningful life. And Stanford University is home to **the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and**

**Education. Their must-read list of books on compassion and happiness** is a wonderful resource on this topic.

And of course, gThankYou has incorporated positive psychology research into content like **Transform Your Workplace with Gratitude**, our free guide to gratitude at work, as well as our **blog posts**. We’ve taken the time to translate the science into practical best practices that can help employees become happier.





# April

## Why Celebrate Easter in the Workplace

Frequent employee appreciation [is key to a productive, happy workforce](#), so you should always be on the lookout for chances to celebrate your team. One oft-neglected opportunity is Easter.

Many businesses avoid Easter-related activities because they want to steer clear of religion in the workplace, but the holiday does have cultural, nonreligious associations and traditions that are relevant to everyone. We can all appreciate its theme of renewal and how it honors the hope and joy of the spring season. It's a perfect time to invest in employees' happiness and well-being.

If you're worried about what is and isn't appropriate, HR expert and TalentCulture founder Meghan M. Biro blogged about [how to approach religious holidays as workplace celebrations](#).

"No sheaves of palms or crucifixes allowed," she writes. "Bunnies, ducks, candy, chocolate, colorful eggs, flowers and other items commonly associated with Easter shouldn't offend anyone." SHRM has a post on [making holiday celebrations more inclusive](#), as well.

Here are a few ways to celebrate Easter at work:

- **Decorations.** Fill your space with plants, flowers, butterflies, bunnies, colorful eggs, and festive baskets. Pinterest is [full of ideas](#)!
- **An egg hunt.** A great team-building opportunity. Fill plastic eggs with candy, gift cards, game tickets, and other surprises. Or have employees turn eggs in for prizes their teams can share.
- **Easter baskets.** Don't limit yourself to candy.
- **Something green.** For cultures less inclined to sugary treats, consider this alternative.

For even more ideas, see our blog post ["Employee Appreciation Gifts for Easter and Spring."](#)

Use good judgment when putting together an Easter workplace event, and run your plans by HR, of course. Now hop to it!

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### Don't-Miss Celebration

**ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY (APRIL 22)** — Administrative professionals deserve our gratitude now more than ever. They're doing *more*, for *more* people. Your administrative staff is no longer on the periphery of your daily business operation but at the heart of what makes your company and workplace culture thrive.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**WORLD HEALTH DAY (APRIL 7)** – The perfect opportunity to kick off a workplace wellness program! The World Health Organization started this day to focus attention on important health issues: 2018's theme was "Health for All." Check out the 2019 theme and [find promotional ideas and materials here](#).

**EASTER (APRIL 12)** — This widely celebrated family occasion has cultural traditions that will appeal to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. Easter appreciation shares in the joy of a new season and celebrates the gratitude and sense of renewal that come with it.

**EARTH DAY (APRIL 22) AND ARBOR DAY** — Get to work for a healthier planet! National Arbor Day is always the last Friday of the month, but celebrations can vary by regional growing season, so check [arborday.org](#) to find opportunities for your team to get involved in tree-planting activities.

## Creating a Culture of Wellness

Your employees are your most important resource, so it stands to reason that you should take care of them, just as you take care of computers, vehicles, and the like. And although you can't control employees' diets or exercise habits, you can create a workplace culture that encourages healthful behavior.

As Dr. Judd Allen explains [in a lengthy interview with the Wellness Council of America](#), "Most wellness programs are directed at individual change—they do not address group, organizational or community change—and I really don't think culture change works that way."

Instead, **creating a culture of wellness relies on establishing norms in your workplace**, such as expecting employees to stop working at lunchtime or having someone in charge of putting in a group order at a healthy takeout place nearby. **It's also essential for leaders to model the healthy behaviors they want to see and for peers to support each other.**

[Writing for Forbes](#), Alan Kohll offers some ideas on what to work on, suggesting that employers encourage movement, offer healthy food, and support work-life balance by being flexible about working from home when possible. As he puts it:

**"Your wellness strategy will not yield significant and sustainable results if employees aren't able to practice a healthy lifestyle during work hours."**

Although it's possible to hire a consultant to do a "wellness audit" of your organization, there's a lot you can do on your own. Check out the linked articles and start creating the wellness culture your employees deserve!

### Key Stats

How important is a strong sense of company culture? Average job turnover at a company with a strong culture is 13.9 percent. At a company with a weak culture, it jumps to 48.4 percent — yikes! (Columbia University)

### Resources for You: Get Happy for World Health Day

Happiness isn't just about feeling good. Increasingly, research has shown that happy people **not only feel better, but also live longer, are less susceptible to illness, and feel more engaged, productive, and in control of their lives.**

In other words, happiness is healthy. No surprise, then, that [Happiness & Its Causes](#) — "the world's largest conference on happiness and wellbeing" — has put together [a great playlist of YouTube videos of its speakers](#) in celebration of **World Health Day**.

Topics range from **"7 Body-Brain Vitality Rituals"** offered by exercise physiologist, nutritionist, and neuroscientist Paul Taylor to **"Optimising Your Brain,"** by Sue Langley, [who explains what to know about the human brain to get the most from experiences](#).

The conference also features [some great videos of talks on its website](#) — with speakers including Kristin Neff, best-selling author of *Self-Compassion*, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

**Consider scheduling a workplace viewing of one or more of these videos on April 7 to mark World Health Day.** Employees can cast votes ahead of time to decide which one to watch. That's the kind of break that makes everyone happy!

World  
HEALTH  
Day





# May

## Secrets to Building a Great Place to Work

As [this Forbes article notes](#), company culture is the backbone of a happy workforce. But building a sustained positive company culture takes time and commitment. Leaders must model company values and train management as culture ambassadors. And culture encompasses all aspects of the business, from hiring to performance metrics.

**Great Place to Work** is an organization that certifies businesses that are, well, great to work for. Their free report **“2019 Fortune 100 Companies Best Trends: Employee Experience at the Best Workplaces in America”** features lots of useful insights. Among them are the qualities that make the 2019 100 Best Companies stand out:

- **Fairness.** Giving everyone opportunities and treating workers fairly leads to huge increases in positive employee experiences. The 100 Best Companies scored 37 to 42 points higher than others here.
- **Trustworthy management.** When managers are “trustworthy, credible and personable,” they have a big impact on retention and workplace satisfaction.
- **Innovation.** This says it all: “When leaders create a safe environment to express ideas and make suggestions, employees are 31 times more likely to think their workplace is innovative.”
- **Pride.** More than anything else, pride drives employee satisfaction. When employees take pride in their company, they are 20 times more likely to say it’s a great place to work.

We encourage you to look at what actual employees who work for companies certified by Great Place to Work are saying. You’ll find both suggestions and cautionary tales. [This link](#) is to a searchable list of certified companies, while [this one](#) takes you to lists that focus on specific industries, locales, or employees by demographic. Now go for greatness!



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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**WORLD LAUGHTER DAY (MAY 3)** — We celebrate World Laughter Day by laughing. It’s that simple! Even fake laughter will do — no joke. Real or not, laughing is aerobic and exercises underused muscles. Besides the health benefits, experts say laughter is an indispensable method for building teamwork, solidifying social bonds, and increasing motivation, happiness, and job engagement.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**TEACHER APPRECIATION DAY (MAY 5)** — Thank the people at your company who make workplace learning and mentoring happen! Teacher Appreciation Day is part of Teacher Appreciation Week, May 4-8.

**NATIONAL RECEPTIONIST DAY (MAY 13)** — Your receptionists are the face of your company and brighten everyone’s day, so brighten theirs for a change!

**NATIONAL EMPLOYEE HEALTH & FITNESS DAY (MAY 20)** — Get your workplace moving! Hand out “trail” maps of walks around your building and local points of interest. Have a contest with prizes for most miles logged over the month.

**MEMORIAL DAY (MAY 25)** — If your business stays open over the holiday weekend, earn your employees’ gratitude by celebrating at work. Host a picnic lunch or have management cover operations while workers enjoy a break to watch the local Memorial Day parade.

## Successful Onboarding for Summer Interns

An internship is a chance to engage with potential future employees. Don’t miss the opportunity to make a good impression.

### Be Welcoming

As soon as your intern accepts an offer and has a start date, send a small gift with a personal note of welcome. A week later, send information highlighting your company’s culture, perks, and achievements to get them excited about the possibilities.

### Calm First-Day Jitters

Even the most eager, dedicated intern is likely inexperienced and in need of guidance. It may be their very first time working in a professional environment. They’re excited, scared, and confused — all at once! On their first day, introduce interns to your team and explain what each member does. Assign an employee as a “buddy” for interns when they have questions.

### Keep It Positive

Interns need to know the rules, but be positive about it. The National Association of Colleges and Employers advises, “Be very clear about your expectations for their workplace conduct in the context that your greatest goal is that they have a successful internship with you.”

## Key Stats

Research shows customer satisfaction was 14 percent higher in organizations with high employee engagement. (Bersin by Deloitte)

### Let Interns Know the Difference They’re Making

As you build trust with interns, gradually give them more responsibility. Show them the impact of their work as soon as possible.

*“Task significance is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction for interns. Interns are likely to be more satisfied if their work significantly impacts other people and the organization.”*  
– Employer’s Resource Council

### Send Them Off With Gratitude

The perfect send-off on an intern’s last day is a small gift, a “Thank You” card, and treats for the whole team. Put your gratitude to work in practical ways, too. Is your intern deserving of a letter of recommendation? Do it right away while your impressions are fresh.

## Mini Case Study: What Makes Hilton a Great Place to Work

It’s always a challenge to keep workers happy, but imagine doing it with 380,000 employees worldwide! [This Great Place to Work profile of Hilton](#) explains how the hospitality company has accomplished just that.

Above all, **Hilton recognizes the importance of every worker** — especially on the front lines. The company treats employees with the same care it gives to customers, in three main ways:

**1. Purpose From the Top:** Hilton CEO Chris Nassetta pays attention to front-line workers — launching a program in which executives spend a week in one of those positions, and empowering all employees to “Make It Right” when faced with a problem.

**2. “For All” Programs.** When Hilton rolls out benefits or development programs, it takes care to ensure they are accessible and will be helpful to employees in every role.

**3. “All People” Leaders.** Leaders at Hilton “show a clear ability to connect with people from different backgrounds and roles, and to build meaningful connections across departments.” As a result, 84% of employees say leaders show ‘a sincere interest in me as a person.’”

The results? High rankings by groups like JD Power and a rise in profits, which are up more than 20% year-over-year. Now *that’s* great!

Hilton



# June

## Being a Good Citizen Is Good for Business

Harvard Business Review **reported on** the beneficial effects when employees engage in “citizenship behaviors” — that is: “helping out coworkers, volunteering to take on special assignments, introducing new ideas and work practices, attending non-mandatory meetings, putting in extra hours to complete important projects, and so forth.”

**Employees who voluntarily demonstrate citizenship behaviors tend to find their work more meaningful and improve performance.**

**They also want to make a difference outside of work.** 74 percent say their job is more fulfilling when provided with opportunities to make a positive impact on social and environmental issues. Corporate responsibility (CR) is also a significant consideration for job candidates — **in one survey, half the respondents said they wouldn’t work for a company that didn’t have strong social or environmental commitments.**

**So how do you encourage being a good citizen, both at your company and outside of it?**

**Management should be clear about the kinds of citizenship behaviors that line up with the company’s needs and values.** And employers should ask employees to be honest about the expressions of citizenship they’re most comfortable with. Take this example from HBR:

*An introverted engineer who dreads socializing but does not mind pulling the occasional all-nighter might feel less obligated to take part in every social event, knowing that she can be the one to take charge when someone has to stay late to complete a critical project.*

To truly make it possible to give back, you should also offer the time and financial support to do it. But most importantly, whether you’re encouraging citizenship behaviors at work or elsewhere, **you need to ensure employees are performing these acts because they want to.** As long as they’re not already stretched too thin, employees want opportunities to excel in ways that are meaningful to them.

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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**SAY SOMETHING NICE DAY (JUNE 1)** — Practice your gratitude with compliments on Say Something Nice Day! A perfect compliment reaches employees’ hearts, not just their heads, and makes them feel that you really understand and care.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**NATIONAL SAFETY MONTH** — Safety is a team effort, so celebrate your team! Host a BBQ workplace meal and make sure all shifts can participate.

**NATIONAL DOUGHNUT DAY (JUNE 5)** — Treat your staff to everyone’s favorite treat for breakfast (or anytime!).

**SUMMER SOLSTICE (JUNE 20)** — Celebrate the start of a new season (and the longest daylight of the year) with a company grill-out or other summery activity.

**UNITED WAY DAY OF ACTION (LATE JUNE)** — Check with your local United Way chapter for activities happening around this time. It’s a great opportunity to kickstart workplace volunteerism programming! Day of Action’s mission, in part, is to demonstrate “what people and businesses working together can accomplish for the good of the community.” Get employees involved in and excited about giving back, and build workplace gratitude!

**PUBLIC SERVICE DAY (JUNE 23)** — Embrace the spirit of public service and civic responsibility with a team volunteer outing or by showing gratitude to local public service workers with a treat (maybe doughnuts...).

## Say Something Nice Today!

**According to Inc.**, a Gallup study found that “employees who receive praise on a regular basis increase their individual productivity, receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers, and are more likely to stay with their organization.”

In this case, “on a regular basis” means once per week. With so many compliments to give, how do you do it well?

1. **Before you speak, ask yourself why.** You’ll land on a better, more specific compliment this way. **These suggestions may get you in the right frame of mind.**
2. **Don’t fake it.** Give compliments you really believe are true — they only work if you’re sincere.
3. **Acknowledge the person’s efforts beyond their skills.** What did it take for them to perform so well? What obstacles did they overcome?
4. **Describe the impact.** People love to hear how their efforts positively affect others.
5. **Use words of appreciation.** Conclude with a simple “Thank You” and emphasize your gratitude!

## Key Stats

Feel like a million bucks after receiving a compliment? It isn’t just a turn of phrase. A **Japanese study found that compliments activate the same part of the brain that’s activated by a gift of cash — literally making praise a form of emotional currency!**



## Resources for You: Minimize Stress and Improve Well-Being!

**Over 70 percent of Americans suffer in response to stress**, according to the American Psychological Association. And that has an impact on their work performance, with the World Health Organization saying that **businesses lose around \$300 billion a year because of problems caused by stress**, like employee absences.

Fortunately, we can take action to reduce stress, as well-being coaches Paul Sherman and David Garten of **What Matters?!** explain in their video **“Well-Being: Creating Fulfillment & Minimizing Stress in Your Everyday Life,”** for the Harvard Alumni Association.

If you tried to run today’s apps on a computer from the 1980s, the machine would crash — and human beings are much the same. **We’re still biologically wired for prehistoric life, but now confronted with a culture that expects us to make far more**

**choices than our ancestors did**, even for something as simple as toothpaste.

Sherman and Garten’s approach consists of five practices and mind-sets, and aims to help you live **“a fully engaged life of purpose, of health, and connection.”** If you’re feeling overwhelmed or your employees are, take an hour and see what they have to say.





# July

## Civility in the Workplace: More Than Just ‘Being Nice’

Rudeness might not sound like a major problem in the workplace. But Science Daily recently described workplace incivility as “the silent epidemic,” and a [Wall Street Journal](#) article delved into how it impacts productivity.

“Witnessing rudeness in the morning can hurt a person’s job performance all day” and diminish their ability to do their best work over a longer term, said the article, based on research from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

So what can you do about it?

Christine Porath is the author of [Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace](#). She described how civility is more than an absence of rudeness:

“Not being rude is about being neutral. And what I’m hoping people will do is be civil in the sense of positive gestures — being respectful, showing dignity, being courteous and being kind in ways that lift other people up. ... **It’s about going beyond neutral and affirming mutual respect and decency and helping others around you.**”

Porath notes that employees who aren’t civil are frequently modeling leaders’ behavior. She advises:

“If you really want to connect with your employees or team, you should focus on leading with warmth. Most people are in a hurry to prove their competence, but warmth actually contributes significantly more to people’s valuations.”

The fastest way to increase civility in the workplace may simply be saying “Thank You.” As a [blog post](#) from the Wallace Centers of Iowa says: “When we are thankful, we take time to appreciate the value of others and we see the world as bigger than ourselves.”

Say Thank You and start setting an example today!



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## Don’t-Miss Celebration

**2020 SUMMER OLYMPICS (JULY 24 – AUG 9TH)** — Everyone loves the excitement and inspiration of the Olympic Games. Take advantage of this unique time to strengthen employee spirit and community! Host an all-family Opening Ceremonies party with Japanese-themed food or a field day of your own Olympic games. Be creative and have fun!

## Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**INDEPENDENCE DAY (JULY 4)** — If your employees work on the 4th of July, be sure they get a chance to celebrate. Host a potluck with a “red, white, and blue” menu and hand out gift certificates for the all-American dessert, pie!

**NATIONAL ICE CREAM DAY (JULY 19)** — A classic reward for a job well done! Ice cream is a treat everyone enjoys.

**INTERN APPRECIATION DAY (JULY 23)** — Your interns are potential future employees, so make the most of this opportunity to engage them! On Intern Appreciation Day, share a small gift, a Thank You card, and treats to let your interns know their time and efforts are appreciated and that they’re part of the company, if only for a few months.

**NATIONAL PICNIC MONTH** — Picnics are low-pressure social occasions perfect for mingling and building camaraderie. Keep it simple with a Friday afternoon barbecue on-site, or plan a family party at a nearby park pavilion with games and kids’ activities.

## Tips to Maximize Employee Recognition Time

In an [HR Bartender survey](#), one in five employees said the chief reason they’d leave their job was to find a more supportive manager. So it’s worth reflecting on these tips for being more mindfully present when recognizing their contributions:

**1. Put away your smartphone.** [HR Dive](#) explored the impact of bosses taking calls and checking their phones while meeting with employees — and, no surprise, employees dislike it. Three quarters said it led to lack of trust and decreased engagement. Bottom line, it’s disrespectful and can increase stress.

**2. Share a little compassion.** A [Harvard Business Review](#) article examined how power neurologically impairs our ability to understand others. To address that, try applying compassion to interactions with employees and others (ask yourself, “How can I be of benefit to this person?”); seeking opportunities to show compassion; and practicing a daily compassion meditation (there’s an example in the article).

**3. Just be nice.** Here’s the “big secret to employee engagement,” per an [HR Dive article](#): Be nice. It’s also an effective way to get people to work more efficiently, motivate a team, and change your corporate culture. As author Cord Himelstein puts it, everyone “will work harder for someone who is nice to them and work less hard for someone who is mean to them.”

## Key Stats

Peer-to-peer recognition is 35.7 percent more likely to have a positive impact on financial results than manager-only recognition. But don’t stop there! The most successful programs also facilitate peers to share value awards. Value-based recognition is key to building a “magnetic employer brand.” (SHRM/Globeforce)



## Mini Case Study: Building a Positive Company Culture the Sweetgreen Way

With so much focus on sales and innovation, it’s easy to forget one crucial factor in a business’s success: company culture.

As Alan Kohll [notes for Forbes](#), a positive culture plays a major role in a company’s performance. It impacts recruiting, loyalty, job satisfaction, and morale. It also improves productivity and collaboration, and makes work less stressful.

The [Sweetgreen](#) healthy restaurant chain takes culture seriously. The company shows appreciation to employees with a variety of benefits, programs, and activities, such as a Family Fund to help workers during emergencies; a “Gratitude Night” when employees receive handwritten notes of

thanks; and the chance to work with community improvement projects.

While Sweetgreen is especially forward-thinking, Kohll notes that any business can build a positive culture. If your company culture needs work, he suggests you start by building on the good things about it — then look at ways to show employees that you’re all in this together. A positive company culture that’s uniquely yours is a competitive advantage no one can touch!

sweetgreen®



# August

## Engage Your Managers and Change Your Company

How important are a company's managers? **Gallup has found** that manager quality accounts for 70 percent of the difference between whether a company is great at engaging its workers or bad at it.

With only 15 percent of workers worldwide saying they feel engaged by their jobs, it's clear that managers play a major role in a company's success. And yet, **Gallup chairman and CEO Jim Clifton says** in an interview about his new book with Jim Harter, *It's the Manager*:

*"Leaders everywhere in the world have a tendency to name the wrong person manager and then train them on administrative things — not how to maximize human potential."*

This is a problem, Clifton says, because the 85 percent of disengaged employees are getting in the way of well-being, success, and growth. But, he notes: **"This problem is very fixable. It is most directly influenced by great front-line managers, who are the ones most responsible for engaging teams."**

So what does Gallup recommend you do to build stronger, better managers? Two things:

- 1. Give them a mission and purpose.** Earning a wage isn't enough. Ensure each manager knows how their work is important to the company's larger goals.
- 2. Develop them properly.** The best kind of professional development doesn't just route managers into a pipeline by job title — it takes individuals' strengths into account and figures out what path will serve them best.

**Clifton also suggests** managers become more like coaches, who will truly see their employees as members of a team and help those workers play a bigger role in the company's success. After all, he says, **"Nothing works in the absence of great managers."**

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### Don't-Miss Celebration

**Friendship Day (AUG. 2)** — Friendship among coworkers has been on the decline for decades yet continues to be a highly valued workplace attribute. **Workplace friendships** drive great organizational culture, find Stanford University researchers.

In honor of Friendship Day, commit to providing collaborative working opportunities so workplace relationships can thrive. And offer workers the chance to engage socially through games, sports, meals, and volunteering. You'll find relationships flourish as well as loyalty to your business.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE WEEK (AUG. 1-7)** — Making life at work simpler takes cooperation and cultural changes. Promote activities focused on well-being: mindfulness, decluttering, time management, and self-care.

**Closing Ceremony 2020 Olympics (Aug 9)** — The end of the Olympics provides a unique opportunity for workplace leaders to engage with workers around the themes of hard work, dedication, grit, teamwork, and other qualities that are exhibited by the athletes. Talk about how these same themes play into your business mission and help employees be excited about being on your team.

**NATIONAL TELL A JOKE DAY (AUG. 16)** — Humor breaks the ice, sparks creative thinking, and improves teamwork. For inspiration, try **The Oatmeal's Dumb Jokes That Are Funny** or Reader's Digest's **"1000s of Our Best Clean Jokes."**

## Keeping Employees Engaged in the Summer

No question — people look forward to summer's more leisurely pace. But that can also mean employers face decreased productivity. In fact, **according to research cited in Entrepreneur, "workplace productivity drops 20 percent during the summer months.** Projects take 13 percent longer to complete and workers are 45 percent more distracted."

Common summer distractions include:

- Vacations (taking, planning, and recovering from them)
- Kids (with school out, child care needs and schedules require adjustment)
- The great outdoors (in many places, summer is the only time to really enjoy being outside)

It's a challenge to keep employees engaged in the face of these and other considerations. Here are a few ideas that might help.

**Offer flexible schedules.** Brigham Young University research says workers with flexible hours "tend to work more intensely" than employees with rigid schedules, because they're grateful for the autonomy and want to keep the privilege.

**Institute "summer Fridays."** In some industries, it's common to leave early during the summer on Fridays. Employees are often already antsy and just

### Key Stats

**Need a good excuse to take a break? A person's ability to think creatively increases about 60 percent when they abandon that office chair for a stroll around the block. (Stanford University)**

waiting out the clock — if their critical work is done, you can score big points by not pointlessly chaining them to their desks.

**Get outside.** Picnic tables can be used for lunch, breaks, meetings, or just working in the sunshine — keeping spirits up!

**Offer learning opportunities.** If summer is slow, it's a perfect time to hold training or educational sessions and break up employees' regular routine.

**Salary.com** and **Integrity HR** have more suggestions. (Trainer Mike Kerr **has some humorous ones**, too.) Just remember: **Summer slowness is a challenge — but also an opportunity to show employees how much you value them!**

### Mini Case Study: Plan a 'Hooky Day'

Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, has a quirky tradition that could be adapted for employee engagement.

Every spring the college hosts its famous "Flunk Day," when classes are canceled and campus becomes a carnival, with games, rides, food, and music. **Nobody knows for sure when it's happening, but everyone looks forward to it.**

Flunk Day is a Knox tradition that dates to the 1920s, and student-organized spring festivals on the Knox campus go back to the beginning of the 20th century. Planners of each year's Flunk Day keep its exact date a closely guarded secret, resulting in weeks of rumors as everyone awaits the big day.

Intrigued? **Consider announcing that your workplace will hold a "play hooky" day during the spring or summer.** Then plan a day full of team-building fun and give everyone an exciting surprise to look forward to!





# September

## Why We Love Workplace Gratitude

Over the last five years, [research has underscored the power of gratitude](#) in our lives. Growing evidence demonstrates that companies that truly appreciate employees are among the most successful and innovative, and have the highest rates of [employee satisfaction and retention](#).

How can gratitude do so much? Multiple studies agree that when companies show genuine appreciation for their employees, they see improvements in six areas:

- 1. Employee retention.** 69 percent of workers say recognition would motivate them to stay in their jobs. And voluntary turnover is 31 percent lower at the top 20 percent of companies that practice effective gratitude.
- 2. Individual performance.** 87 percent of executives say employee appreciation directly affects productivity. And 79 percent of regularly recognized employees are highly engaged at work.
- 3. Team performance.** A full 32 percent of teams work at 80 to 100 percent capacity in workplaces that show gratitude effectively. In workplaces that don't, it's only 17 percent.
- 4. Employee happiness.** A whopping 86 percent of workers say genuine recognition makes them prouder and happier. And 85 percent say receiving recognition improves job satisfaction.
- 5. Employee well-being.** Well-being is 13 percent stronger among employees who say they feel appreciated — and productivity is 20 percent higher among workers with a strong sense of well-being.
- 6. Customer relationships.** 77 percent of customer-facing employees say receiving appreciation from their company helps improve the quality of the customer's experience — and indeed, customer satisfaction has been found to rise 41 percent at companies that employee peer-to-peer recognition.

Who wouldn't love all that? If you're interested in more information about how to use gratitude in your workplace, [download our free ebook today!](#)

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### Don't-Miss Celebration

**WORLD GRATITUDE DAY (SEPT. 21)** — Need another reason to celebrate gratitude — besides its profound effect on happiness, social engagement, and motivation? Here's another: health!

In stressful situations, grateful people demonstrate lower spikes in blood pressure. This resilience exists on a *biological* level! It explains why grateful people are able to bounce back from stress or hardships more quickly.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**LABOR DAY (SEPT. 7)** — Send employees off for the long weekend with a company-wide all-family picnic or outdoor family movie night.

**POSITIVE THINKING DAY (SEPT. 13)** — Positive thinking is a conscious choice. Inspire it in employees by handing out fortune cookies with positive messages tucked inside.

**NATIONAL TRUCK DRIVER APPRECIATION WEEK (SEPT. 13-19)** — Appreciation is missing for many of today's truck drivers. The prospect of automation in the industry is making truckers feel undervalued, underappreciated, and nervous about their future. Yet trucking continues to be crucial to the economy, and drivers continue to be in high demand. Go the extra mile for driver appreciation this week! Trucking is often lonely work, so focus on recognition that forges a personal connection and builds a sense of purpose.

## Gratitude: The Happiness Hack

While "Thank You" may be one of the most commonly uttered phrases on the planet, genuine gratitude is not as abundant as it ought to be. [As productivity and life coach Darius Foroux points out](#), most of us are prone to complaining, despite wanting happiness.

There's a quick way to fix that, though — a "hack," because it's something you can do on your own that gets the job done quickly. **You won't be surprised to learn that the happiness hack is none other than gratitude.**

Researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*, [notes that](#), among other things, **gratitude keeps us from taking things for granted**. Just stopping to recognize the small things that make your life better will add to our happiness.

Even better, she says, gratitude neutralizes negative emotions. Indeed, as Lyubomirsky puts it: **"It's almost impossible to feel grateful and at the same time feel greedy or envious or bitter or anxious."**

And the best part is that gratitude is free and not that hard to practice. By doing something as simple as keeping a weekly gratitude journal, subjects in a study increased their happiness substantially.

That's a pretty good deal! If you're looking to become happier yourself (and who isn't?), it's time to give this hack a try. As Foroux reminds us: **"When you're grateful, you don't only feel better, you also get a better life. Good things come to those who appreciate what they have."**



### Key Stats

Recognizing remote workers may soon be the rule, not the exception. Between 80% and 90% of the U.S. workforce says they would like to work remotely at least part-time. Studies repeatedly show that employees at Fortune 1000 companies are not at their desk 50-60% of the time. (Global Workplace Analytics)

## Resources for You: Get a Head Start on Workplace Holiday Gifts

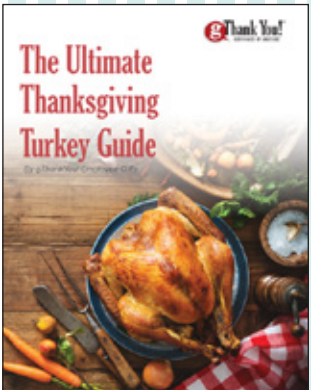
With summer break and Labor Day out of the way, now is the time to get ahead of the game before things ramp up for the fourth quarter and the winter holidays arrive.

So how about checking an item off Future You's to-do list? **Take care of end-of-year gifts for employees now**, and your own holidays may be a bit brighter (or at least less stressful).

Of course, at gThankYou we have ideas about the best kind of workplace gift. **Giving workers a turkey for Thanksgiving has been a business tradition for over a century.** The centerpiece of a meal with family and friends, turkey is valued and appreciated by everyone!

There are a lot of reasons [turkey makes an ideal employee gift](#) at the holidays, and our Turkey Gift Certificates make a good thing even better. No need for the messy and complicated logistics that come with a frozen turkey gift. Management can still hand out your turkey gifts personally, and recipients can purchase the size, brand, and preparation of turkey that's best for their family.

If you haven't ordered turkey gift vouchers before, relax, it's easy! The team at gThankYou makes employee holiday gift giving as smooth as possible. [Order your Turkey Gift Certificates from gThankYou online or by phone today!](#)





# October

## Bring Out the Best in Employees

How do you get the best from your workers? It's not a matter of simply paying people more. Bringing out the best in your employees means building a workplace where they feel like they truly belong. As Jake Herway puts it in [a Gallup blog post](#):

**"An organization full of employees who believe they belong is an organization full of employees who feel purposeful, inspired and alive."**

Herway cites rock-star researcher Brené Brown's work on belonging, which explains that it is largely about vulnerability, because **to feel a genuine sense of belonging, a person must feel accepted even when they show weakness or imperfection.** The four crucial "meaningful moments" involving this dynamic in the workplace are when an employee:

1. Proposes a new idea
2. Asks for help
3. Pushes back on something
4. Asks for a favor

In all of these instances, an employee is putting themselves out there. When the company responds positively, that reinforces to the employee that she's working for people who share her values and that her managers support her.

Herway shares another example of a salesman who asked for more training in front of other employees. Though the company claimed to support this kind of request, his boss chewed him out privately afterward, for sounding "weak." That's an employee whose trust has been lost.

To create a culture where vulnerability is allowed, **Herway suggests using storytelling to share moments when employees took risks that paid off.** Such stories are a great way to show workers what they can expect if they stick their neck out for the company. And when employees feel supported in those moments, they'll give you their best.



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### Don't-Miss Celebration

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY (OCT. 24)** — **Make a Difference Day** is all about helping — a celebration of neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteerism helps build a connected, community-engaged workforce culture.

When employees see senior executives in jeans and T-shirts on a Saturday morning working side-by-side with everyone else, it builds a culture of inclusion. Volunteering together also switches up the communication hierarchy and improves workplace collaboration.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**NATIONAL CUSTODIAL WORKERS DAY (OCT. 2)** — Custodial work isn't clearly connected to company goals, yet it is crucial to everyday operations. Have management publicly recognize your custodial staff for creating a clean, safe, and comfortable workplace.

**NATIONAL BOSS DAY (OCT. 16)** — Workplace leaders are engagement role models, so be sure they get the same kind of recognition you want them to give!

**HALLOWEEN (OCT. 31)** — People love Halloween. According to **Harris Poll**, it ranks third among U.S. adults for favorite holiday, outranking the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and even "my birthday." It's also naturally geared toward creative, active engagement activities, from carving pumpkins to making costumes!



## Everyday Thank You Ideas

It's important to share thanks daily — not just on holidays or at the annual company picnic. Sustaining gratitude is like tending a garden, so think of these fun activities as extra water to keep the soil rich!

**Try Thank-You Note Thursdays.** Try letter-writing as a regular group activity, between coworkers or from employees to customers or vendors. Spending a few minutes each week to express gratitude can help strengthen vital relationships. Bring in a low-cost treat like bagels and juice to get everyone jazzed to meet.

**Start a gratitude board.** Put up a bulletin board or create a space online where employees can easily thank or commend each other and share appreciation for your company's achievements.

**Offer flex time or time off.** Employees consistently name time off or a flexible schedule as a perk that means a lot to them. Giving someone the afternoon off when they've completed a major task or letting them come in late signals that you value the high quality of their work more than just the quantity of hours they spend at the office.

**Throw a surprise appreciation party.** If your team has been working hard and deserves a break, surprise them by ending the workday earlier than usual and breaking out the food, drink, and even a few party favors. Pro tip: Schedule it as a meeting in their calendars ahead of time to reduce the chances that someone needs to take a call or go out to see a client.



### Key Stats

**80 percent of executives realize how important the employee experience is, but only 22 percent believe their organizations deliver a validating, respectful environment. (Deloitte)**

## Resources for You: Do Peer-to-Peer Recognition Right!

While managers and company leadership have a responsibility to recognize employees' achievements, interestingly they aren't necessarily the source of the most meaningful feedback. HRTechnologist **cites an SHRM survey** that found that "peer-to-peer recognition is 35.7% more likely to have a positive impact on financial results."

Larger businesses are increasingly investing in software platforms that track employees' success and make it easy for them to recognize each other. As **an expert who spoke to SHRM about recognition platforms put it:**

**"It is no longer about nominating someone and requiring that one or two managers sign off on the nomination, but [instead] giving employees the kind of decision support or training where they can initiate and complete the whole recognition process themselves."**

A platform should be easy to use and to incorporate into the daily workflow. And even if you don't invest in such a system, consider **these tips from Sodexo** as you design your program:

- Involve employees in developing it — otherwise, they'll likely see it as another HR gimmick
- Make sure everyone has an equal opportunity for recognition — a program that slants recognition toward senior staff is actually counterproductive
- Tell employees to make recognitions specific — "You handled Mrs. Smith's complaint quickly and she was very grateful" vs. "Nice job"
- Recognize achievements ASAP — immediate praise reinforces the behavior

For more tips and information on the benefits of peer-to-peer recognition, **check out this article from O.C. Tanner.** Start sharing your workplace gratitude!



# November

## How to Write a Holiday Letter of Gratitude

At their core, the holidays are about gratitude. While that's obvious in the case of Thanksgiving, the other winter holidays are also, ultimately, an opportunity to reflect on all the people important to our work and personal lives — and to express our thanks for them.

As such, it's important that your company's leaders take the time to share their thanks for the employees who've worked so hard for them all year. And there's no better way to do that than with a **note or letter of gratitude**.

As longtime Thank You note fan Brian Buffini put it in **a column for Entrepreneur**:

**"When people open their mail, a personal note is always the first thing they read. After all, it stands out among all the junk mail and bills! And in this high-tech, social media-driven world, I find personal notes are even more powerful and better received than ever before."**

Indeed, employee Thank You notes are among the top three recognition initiatives having the biggest impact on engagement, an SHRM survey found. Employees who are regularly recognized stay at their jobs two years longer on average, according to O.C. Tanner research.

**A good Thanksgiving message of gratitude:**

- Recognizes **the big-picture impact** of employee work, giving specific examples.
- Tells the **success story of your company**, with employees as key players.
- Thanks employees for rising to **significant challenges**.
- Is **genuine and heartfelt**, not gushing or sentimental.
- Uses a friendly, "we're in this together" tone of **company pride**.
- **Reiterates gratitude** again with a final "Thank You."



This holiday season, do your part to kickstart more frequent expressions of gratitude in your workplace. For more tips on writing a meaningful holiday letter of gratitude, **download our free ebook right now!**

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### Don't-Miss Celebrations

**THANKSGIVING (NOV. 26) —** Thanksgiving is the holiday of "giving thanks" and the perfect opportunity to share your gratitude with employees. Everyone appreciates the gift of a Thanksgiving turkey to share with family and friends.

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**WORLD SCIENCE DAY FOR PEACE & DEVELOPMENT (NOV. 10) —** Established by UNESCO in 2001, World Science Day is a celebration of science in our daily lives. The theme changes year to year, from astronomy to culture to green living. Highlight and celebrate the accomplishments of the scientists within your company, or take the day as an opportunity for community outreach.

**WORLD KINDNESS DAY (NOV. 13) —** Give employees cash or gift cards to perform random acts of kindness in the community — cover lunch for someone who can't afford it, buy groceries for a homeless person, or treat the neighbor kids to ice cream. Encourage employees to be creative!

**GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT (NOV. 20) —** Though smoking is on the decrease, tobacco use is still the leading preventable cause of death worldwide. Help employees kick their cigarette habit with help from the American Cancer Society. Support can make all the difference.

## How to Put the Thanks Into Thanksgiving

When you want to send a clear message, it's best to stick to the fundamentals, the traditions. And nothing is more traditional and appreciated than employers giving workers a turkey for the holidays.

As the centerpiece of the annual feast, **the gift of a Thanksgiving turkey** is a token of gratitude and joy that everyone can appreciate. It's the heart of the beloved tradition of a big Thanksgiving meal, shared with family and friends. Thanksgiving is the one day we treat all Americans as family.

**Giving turkeys has endured as a workplace holiday tradition because a turkey represents gratitude, harvest bounty, and our shared history.**

Turkeys have become a universal symbol for these powerful sentiments. And turkeys are native to North America — which is just one big part of why they're the ideal main course for the oldest American holiday, Thanksgiving. (In fact, founding father Alexander Hamilton even once said: **"No citizen of the U.S. shall refrain from turkey on Thanksgiving Day."**)

**Giving employees a holiday turkey is a reminder of your commitment to them.** As they celebrate with their loved ones, they'll be thinking of your gratitude while sharing their Thanksgiving feast. At Thanksgiving time, there is no more valuable gift of gratitude to share than the gift of a turkey.

### Key Stats

Per-capita turkey consumption in the U.S. has more than doubled since 1970. The average American now eats 16 pounds of it per year. We call Thanksgiving "Turkey Day" for a reason — nearly 88 percent of Americans eat turkey on this day, consuming a total of 46 million turkeys. Turkey is also popular at Christmas (22 million) and Easter (19 million). (USDA, National Turkey Federation)



### Mini Case Study: A 'Thank You' to Inspire for Thanksgiving

Former Campbell Soup Company CEO Doug Conant has a legendary reputation for thanking people. While leading the company through a dramatic turnaround, he wrote more than 30,000 handwritten Thank You notes to staffers and clients.

Though all those notes weren't solely responsible for fixing Campbell's troubles, they did help create "a company-wide culture of gratitude," according to Business Insider. Conant's commitment to gratitude was almost certainly a factor in the storied company's reinvention and renewed success under his leadership from 2001 to 2011.

In a must-read editorial for Harvard Business Review, Conant himself explains his management strategy as a marriage of "tough-minded performance standards with tender-heartedness."

"It's worth mentioning that when Conant took the reins at Campbell Soup, the stock price was falling and it was the worst performer of all the major food companies in the world ... By 2009, the company was ahead of the S&P Food Group and the S&P 500," Business Insider's Shana Lebowitz writes.

She concludes: **"Bottom line: showing gratitude can motivate your team to work harder, and you probably aren't showing enough right now."**

If that's true, there's still time to correct it! Take a cue from Doug Conant and don't let the year end without telling employees how grateful you are for them.





# December

## What Your Employees Really Want for the Holidays

This holiday season give employees what they really want – your gratitude. And if budgets allow, skip the tchotchkes and logo wear, and give employees a thoughtful practical gift to share with family or colleagues. Consider these options for something employees will appreciate:

**Bonuses.** Money isn’t everything, sure, but as **Business News Daily** notes, almost 80 percent of employers offer a holiday bonus — so you could risk looking like Scrooge if you don’t too.

**Extra PTO.** Many people travel or take time off at the holidays to see family or friends. But many also find it hard to get the paid time off they need. Trust us: Your employees would love having an extra two days to celebrate with loved ones.

**Something customized and special.** At **Forbes**, Shep Hyken cites Giftology author John Ruhlin, who recommends **gifts that can be enjoyed with family and that last beyond the holidays**. For instance, **an acrylic award from gapingvoid** expressing your gratitude.

**Purpose.** And then, of course, Alan Kohll **at Forbes** reminds us that “Many employees feel that they are just working for a paycheck and aren’t contributing to the greater good of society.” **Research shows** that employees who are given the chance to contribute to the world outside of work tend to perform better. **Consider creating opportunities for workers to volunteer in ways that play to their natural strengths.** (Just make sure that it really is voluntary — otherwise, it’s not really a gift!)

Need more ideas? Check out our free ebook, **The Ultimate Guide to Employee Gift-Giving!** And whatever you give employees this season, remember to say Thank You too!



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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**NATIONAL THANK YOU NOTE DAY (DEC. 26)** — Celebrate by setting aside a post-holiday workday dedicated to writing customer Thank You notes! Provide the food and make it casual and fun. While you are at it, commit to a Thank You notes plan for the new year. A handwritten note is a powerful way to share gratitude with customers, clients, and employees!

### Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**GIVING TUESDAY (DEC.1)** — Rally your team around actionable gratitude on Giving Tuesday! **GivingTuesday.org** offers tons of resources to help you plan workplace activities.

**INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY (DEC. 5)** — Celebrate the people who give back within your organization. Recognize and thank volunteers within your workforce with a honorary luncheon and highlight their work in your workplace newsletter.

**FESTIVUS (DEC. 23)** — A popular parody holiday first mentioned in a 1997 episode of Seinfeld, Festivus has traditions employees can celebrate too!

**CHRISTMAS (DEC. 25)** — Not every worker has the biggest holiday of the year off. If any of your employees will be working, make sure you take care of them (here are some tips) and remember it going forward.

**NEW YEAR’S EVE (DEC. 31)** — Take advantage of year-end to recap the year and highlight the new with your workplace. Make it an annual tradition to celebrate successes and remind employees why what they do is so important to the success of the company.

## Last-Minute Gift Ideas Employees Will Love

Here are affordable employee gift ideas convenient enough to arrange at the last minute.

**A group gift.** Consider a group outing, an upgrade to the break room, or a holiday luncheon or party (if you’re not already planning one).

**Productivity apps or tools.** Digital apps can be delivered instantly, with no physical orders or trips to the store. Poll employees on which app will save them time or make them even better at their jobs.

**Subscriptions.** No longer just for magazines, **subscriptions exist nowadays for everything from** streaming entertainment to **socks**. And they can be ordered easily online and gifted immediately.

**Gift certificates for the centerpiece to a holiday meal.** The workplace **gift of a turkey or ham** is a beloved tradition of gratitude that stretches back decades. Gift certificates eliminate the logistical difficulties of storing and distributing frozen turkeys or hams, and they give employees the flexibility to choose what’s best for their family celebration.



### Key Stats

Workplace gratitude affects the bottom line. A 10-year study of 200,000 employees found that in companies where few people agreed that “My organization recognizes excellence,” annual return on equity averaged a paltry 2.4 percent. In contrast, companies with a culture that emphasized thanking people for excellent performance racked up returns more than three times as high!

## Mini Case Study: Throw the Holiday Party You Want

Holiday work parties go one of two ways — they’re something the employer has to do, or something they want to do, according to writer Jake Kilroy in his Entrepreneur article “**The Nicest Party I’ve Ever Been To: A Christmas Story.**”

Kilroy reflects on a Christmas party he attended years ago while working for J&M Promotions, a uniform and screen-printing company in California. It was a formal affair at an upscale restaurant. The lavish presentation, expensive dinner and generous open bar totally wowed Kilroy and his coworkers, most of whom were young and used to a casual environment.

But what stood out most to Kilroy was how much his employer wanted to throw the party.

The company owners “welcomed us like family” at the door and asked employees to write down their favorite holiday memory on a piece of paper. Later, after dessert, employees took turns reading aloud a coworker’s name and favorite memory. As an employee’s favorite memory was shared, the company owners invited the employee to get up and choose a wrapped present underneath the Christmas tree in the dining room, in addition to a \$50 gift card.

The J&M Promotions owners worked hard to make it a special party, and it was effective. Kilroy writes,

**“I had never had such warmth and respect at a job before.”**





#### About gThankYou!® Certificates of Gratitude™

At **gThankYou**, we believe celebrating employees and customers is good business. That's why we provide company leaders with a variety of easy, meaningful, and affordable ways to recognize and reward employees, customers and clients, holiday time or anytime!

**gThankYou! Turkey Gift Certificates** and **Turkey Or Ham Gift Certificates** are two of America's favorite employee gifts for the holidays and can be redeemed for any brand (Turkey or Turkey Or Ham), any preparation, at virtually any chain grocery store in the U.S.

All gThankYou Certificates of Gratitude come with **free custom Enclosure Cards**, which include your choice of design, your message, and your company logo (if you wish). Check out our **Thanksgiving** and **Winter Holiday** design catalogs — we have dozens of designs from which to select. And nearly all orders ship the day they are received.

We also offer **free cookbooks to download and share** — the *Ultimate Thanksgiving Turkey Guide* and the *Holiday Ham Guide*. Both are perfect companions to go with your thoughtful gift of a gThankYou Turkey, Ham, or Grocery Gift Certificate.

To learn more about gThankYou! Certificates of Gratitude:

- Visit our website — [www.gThankYou.com](http://www.gThankYou.com).
- Watch our **"About Us" video** featuring company founder Rick Kiley.
- Download our **free product guide**.
- See our collection of **free enclosure cards** available with all purchases.
- Follow **"Celebrating Work"** — our company blog.
- Join the conversation! [@gThankYou](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [Pinterest](#).

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Contact: Rick Kiley, Chief ThankYou! Officer

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Call toll-free at **888-484-1658**

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## 7 Tips to Writing Great Employee Thank You Notes

The best thank-you notes are...

- 1. Handwritten.** In the digital age, a handwritten note stands out. It creates a document of gratitude worth saving, pinning to the wall, or memorializing in a photo album.
- 2. Heartfelt.** Try writing as you would speak. Don't shy away from opening up and sharing your feelings. It's important to be genuine. It won't take away from the overall professional, grateful tone.
- 3. Personal.** Establish the bond you feel with the recipient. It takes all kinds to run a successful business, so honor and celebrate everyone's distinctive personality.
- 4. Specific.** Even three sentences is fine, as long as you explain specifically why you're grateful and include a positive send-off that has an eye toward the future ("I look forward to seeing you work your magic on the next project!").
- 5. Timely.** Don't save up your gratitude for a once-a-year blowout. Your Thank You has the most impact right away.

- 6. Delivered in person.** If possible, deliver your letter with a handshake, big smile, and "Thank you!"
- 7. A habit!** Gratitude is like a muscle that needs flexing to grow. Make note-writing a regular part of your workweek and it'll get easier and faster with time. Be a role model and train others to do the same. Watch what happens — gratitude is contagious!



## Our Mission

gThankYou is dedicated to helping organizations celebrate and say "thank you" to valued employees, customers and clients – holiday time or anytime.

We believe happy workplaces are successful workplaces. Research shows sharing gratitude in the workplace builds overall health, happiness, community and increased productivity and profits. That's why we're committed to helping company leaders build vibrant cultures of engagement and gratitude. We offer gThankYou! Certificates of Gratitude in a range of varieties and price points to fit most workplace needs and budgets.

gThankYou is dedicated to sharing its message of workplace gratitude by offering free resources and a blog full of best-practice thinking. "Celebrating Work" publishes insights, inspiration and up-to-date thinking about building great workplace cultures. We welcome you to download, subscribe, share and join the conversation!

Share your "thank you" today and you'll not only make colleagues feel valued and loyal, you'll inspire a chain of gratitude in your workplace that can develop into a superior workforce, more profits and more fun. Why wait?