

The Ultimate Guide to Employee Gift-Giving

A publication by gThankYou!





INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our gThankYou! Ultimate Guide to Employee Gift-Giving 2.0. So much has changed in all aspects of the marketplace since we first published the guide in 2012 that we decided to renew and refresh this e-book. The economy, technology, the workforce, employee-engagement strategies and tools—all have transformed—and this version 2.0 incorporates new research results and data, trends, and learnings.

What hasn't changed is the paramount importance of workplace recognition and gift-giving. In fact, with the rise of the Millennial workforce and the retirement of many Baby Boomers, employee appreciation is more critical than ever. Younger employees, particularly Millennials, want more feedback and recognition. The competition for skilled workers is fierce, and the right employee-recognition strategies—including timely, appropriate gift-giving—can make a world of difference in your employee retention efforts, the engagement and productivity of your staff, and, ultimately, the success of your business.

We hope you enjoy this guide and find it valuable. Suggestions? Comments? Please feel free to reach out to us at info@gThankYou.com or 888-484-1658.



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CHAPTER 1: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

BUILDING WORKER SATISFACTION AND A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL.

- Do your employees know how important they are to you?
- Do they understand how their daily work contributes to your overall mission?
- Do they find their jobs meaningful?

If not, you're likely to lose your top talent.

Star employees have more choices today and they know it.

Gallup's **State of the American Workplace** report shows that 63% of U.S. adult employees believe it's "very likely" or "somewhat likely" they could find a job as good as their current one, up from 42% in 2010. Today's number is close to Gallup's 2007 pre-recession finding.

As the search for skilled workers intensifies and job opportunities increase, fewer employees are content to stay with employers that don't meet their needs for recognition and fulfillment. The Gallup report shows 51% of workers are looking for new jobs or watching for openings.

Workplace recognition guru **O.C. Tanner** cautions:

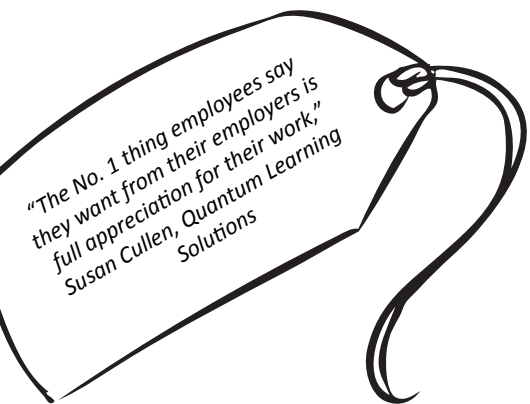
"And they aren't the non-performers you hope will leave. They are your star players. The ones who are confident they have options. The ones you can't afford to lose."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION IS VITAL AND COMPANY CULTURE IS KEY.

Company culture is one of the top five reasons workers leave their jobs, according to Gallup. Engagement strategies—including recognition programs—are essential to creating a great workplace culture.

The other four reasons are:

- Career growth opportunities
- Job fit
- Pay and benefits
- Management



"The No. 1 thing employees say they want from their employers is full appreciation for their work,"
Susan Cullen, Quantum Learning Solutions



Gallup's Jim Harter and Amy Adkins, in **"Are Your Star Employees Slipping Away?"** observe that all five reasons link to organizations' employee engagement strategies. For example:

"... workers who feel detached from their company cultures are unlikely to agree that the mission or purpose of their company makes them feel their job is important ... a key element of engagement."

It's critical that companies give employees a reason to choose them, stay with them and perform at their best. That's where recognition programs come in.

EMPLOYEES WANT RECOGNITION.

Everybody wants to feel valued and appreciated—and that includes your employees. Josh Bersin, of **Bersin by Deloitte**, shares telling statistics:

- Organizations scoring in the top 20% for "recognition-rich cultures" had 31% lower voluntary turnover rates.
- Organizations with reward programs in place see a 14% improvement in employee engagement and productivity.

Glassdoor's **Employee Appreciation Survey** finds:

- Receiving appreciation for their work motivates more than 80% of employees to work harder.
- 53% of employees would stay longer at their jobs if they received more appreciation.

As **O.C. Tanner** says:

"Employee recognition done right can transform your organization, ignite enthusiasm, increase innovation, and drive bottom-line results."

SAY THANK YOU.

At its roots, an employee recognition program helps you thank your employees for their hard work and contributions.

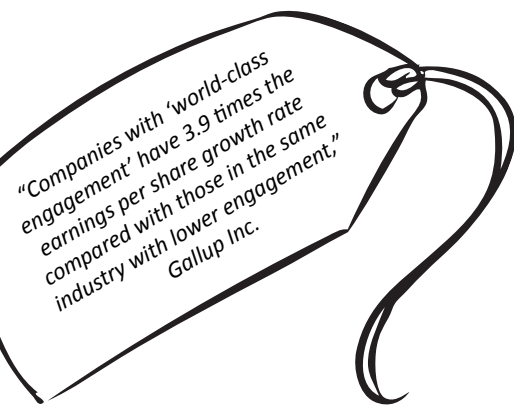




Many of us spend half of our waking days at work. We must find meaning and joy and personal growth in our work. If we don't, it's drudgery. It is essential for leaders to create real meaning in people's work lives. Often leaders make it more difficult than it really is.

OK. So, what's one easy way to bring meaning to work? Give up? It's to say "Thank You" often. Not just "thanks" or "I appreciate that," say it forcefully, look someone in the eye and really mean it.

Too few business leaders do this, but **Harvey Mackay** does. He's the author of two famed inspirational business books—both *New York Times* #1 bestsellers—***Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*** and ***Beware the Naked Man Who Offers You His Shirt***. In 1959, at age 26, he purchased a small, failing envelope company. Since then, his MackayMitchell Envelope Company has grown to a \$100 million business employing over 600 people.



gThankYou president Rick Kiley once sent Mackay a Thank You note for inscribing a copy of his book. Imagine his surprise and delight when Mackay responded with a Thank You note for the Thank You note! Now that's commitment. Kiley still has the note. Many an employee saves notes from the boss—they're that meaningful and powerful.

Renowned business leader Doug Conant, founder of **ConantLeadership**, also understands the power of a sincere Thank You note. Before founding his firm, he honed his leadership craft at the most senior levels—first as president of the Nabisco Foods Company, then as CEO of Campbell Soup Company, and finally as chairman of Avon Products.

In his *Harvard Business Review* blog post, **"The Secrets of Positive Feedback,"** he recounts:

"Believe it or not, I have sent roughly 30,000 handwritten notes to employees ... over the last decade, from maintenance people to senior executives. On the face of it, writing handwritten notes may seem like a waste of time. But in my experience, they build goodwill and lead to higher productivity."

A Thank You, a personal note, a small gift—all of these essential employee appreciation tools—will help the people in your work life feel valued all year long. That's a critical element of employee satisfaction, engagement, retention, and boosting your bottom line.



THAT GOES DOUBLE FOR MILLENNIALS

Our workforce's youngest members, the Millennials and Gen Z, are especially eager for appreciation from their employers. Studies show many feel they're not getting it.

- An **Aon Hewitt and O.C. Tanner study** of more than 470 employers across five countries assessed their recognition programs. One in four organizations believe their recognition programs are ineffective for millennial workers.
- Another **Aon Hewitt report** shows that nearly two in five millennials (38%) would like to see improved recognition programs at their current employers.
- A **Hawk Incentives (formerly Blackhawk Engagement Solutions) study** examines what makes millennial employees happy and more productive, finding that Millennials are happy and comfortable at work—except with rewards and recognition.

Rodney Mason, Hawk's GVP of marketing, explains:

"Millennials are accustomed to attention and praise from their earliest days, and expect regular affirmation in the workplace. They are also prepared to switch jobs earlier and more frequently than previous generations, so employers need to take particular steps to maintain Millennial engagement."

Organizations with effective recognition programs for millennials include three rewards vehicles:

1. Handwritten notes
2. Experiential rewards such as event tickets or gift cards and gift certificates
3. "Thank you" from peers, managers, or senior executives

Aon Hewitt's Neil Shastri, leader of global insights & innovation, puts it this way:

"Millennials have a greater need to be recognized and want to be in front of management much sooner than previous generations. Being recognized and thanked by leaders in a meaningful way and on a frequent basis not only gives millennial workers a rewarding experience, but also strengthens their personal connection to the organization and encourages them to continue to be key contributors."



MANAGERS DON'T ALWAYS GET IT

"Why should I recognize employees when they're just doing their jobs?"

That's a question Roy Saunderson, president and founder of Rideau Recognition Solutions' VISTANCE® Institute hears all too often.

But, as he observes in his article, **"Training Managers to Give Employee Recognition,"** for the APA Center for Organizational Excellence:

"The contractual work agreement is not the sole reward; there is a psychological, emotional and purposeful recognition-based piece that many of us long for."

It's clear that managers and supervisors play a critical role in employee engagement, in providing that purposeful recognition employees want.

Our blog post, **"Best Ways to Foster Employee Engagement,"** discusses Dale Carnegie Training's take on how leaders and managers can better foster engagement. The organization's research shows that the employee/supervisor relationship is the top driver of engagement, and that managers can and should be responsible for creating and sustaining engagement with direct reports, departments, and work groups.

- Middle managers play a special role in making sure employees feel they're being heard and passing those comments along to senior management.
- Senior leaders must model the behavior they want, and provide engagement and recognition training and support to direct reports and middle managers.

Another gThankYou blog post, **"Savvy HR: Training Managers in Employee Appreciation,"** points out that recognition contributes to the success of a business, to its survival, really. That's why it's critical that managers learn how to recognize their employees and show their gratitude often. They also need to learn why giving recognition and rewards is important and how it benefits them, their employees, and their companies.

That knowledge may not come naturally, especially for supervisors or managers promoted from within because of their technical skills and potential rather than their management experience.



A **WorldatWork Trends in Employee Recognition survey** reports nearly nine in 10 responding organizations have recognition programs in place.

Yet of nearly four million employees surveyed in a Gallup Organization “**Q12**” meta-analysis, 65% perceived that they’d received no recognition at all on the job the previous year.

Rideau Recognition Solutions’ Saunderson offers a list of things leaders should do with managers—learners—as part of recognition training:

- Meet with the potential learners to set expectations for applying the learning upon employees’ return so they can see how recognition can make an impact from day one.
- Maximize managers’ accountability and enlist social reinforcement of peers if possible. Giving recognition may not be easy for everyone so allowing for partnering with other managers for role-playing and support can help.
- Offer mentorship opportunities. Encourage new managers or managers new to recognition activities with the opportunity to learn from more experienced managers.
- Write a learning contract with expectations of both the learner and the manager.
- Encourage and recognize your hard-working learners. Make sure they know their efforts are vital to building a successful workplace.
- Expect a report upon return—schedule follow-up meetings before managers even attend training. Schedule follow-up on an agreed-to basis over the year to ensure skills are successfully taking root and used.

Also, consider providing your managers with some inspiring reading to help them give employees the recognition and appreciation they deserve. Here are two books we like:

- **The Coaching Habit**, by Michael Bungay Stanier, acknowledges that people are working as hard as they can, often feeling over-committed, over-connected, and overwhelmed. It provides strategies for changing the way you work—not working harder, but having more impact.
- **The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace**, by Gary Chapman and Paul White. This book helps supervisors and managers effectively communicate appreciation and encouragement to their employees, resulting in higher levels



of job satisfaction, healthier relationships between managers and employees, and decreased cases of burnout.

The main point, Saunderson emphasizes:

“It’s up to leaders to help managers make recognition-giving become a way of life—a part of the culture—and not just another program-of-the-month scenario.”

MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE THE EXCEPTION

Alarming, employee engagement is declining around the world. A recent Aon Hewitt study, **2017 Trends in Global Employee Engagement**, reveals that employee engagement has dropped for the first time since 2012. It shows that fewer than 25% of employees are highly engaged and 39% are moderately engaged. In a single year, employee engagement globally dropped from 65% in 2015 to 63% in 2016.

The study also shows a link between employee engagement and revenue growth, and dire consequences when engagement decreases. These include higher absenteeism and turnover, lower customer satisfaction, and lower financial performance.

But your company can buck this trend. With effort and focus, you can build and maintain a culture of appreciation and engagement that leads to business success.

What Can You Do?

- Create an annual recognition plan including year-round employee gift-giving. Use our annual **Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar** as a resource and creative inspiration. It’s full of ready-to-go and don’t miss celebration occasions month by month, plus articles, case studies and helpful “how-to’s”. Use every opportunity to demonstrate your gratitude to employees.
- Make it personal. Know your employees well enough to congratulate them for a good effort or for reaching a milestone.
- Look for ways to publicly express employee recognition. It doesn’t have to be formal, just sincere and heartfelt.
- Remember to celebrate teams and work groups. Recognizing important group accomplishments can both reinforce company strategy and motivate workers.



Download your **FREE Day-to-Day Employee Appreciation Calendar** and inspire your annual recognition planning!



- Present small, thoughtful gifts occasionally as an opportunity to say “bravo,” or “just wanted to let you know we appreciate all the hard work you’ve been putting in recently.”
- Involve employees in recognition planning. Create a feedback loop so employees feel they can be a valued part of the process.
- Train managers and hold them accountable—employee motivation is a key driver in achieving your business success.
- Finally, a handwritten personal note of thanks will always make your recipient feel valued. Do it as often as you can.





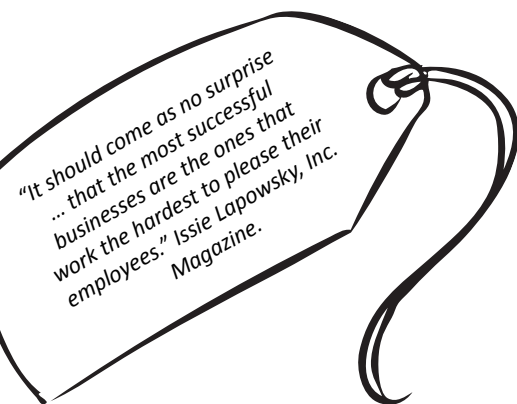
CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

"Employee Engagement is the difference between winning and losing in the marketplace."

Employee-recognition firm **Globoforce** says it clearly. Creating a culture of employee engagement—which requires showing appreciation and giving recognition—means business success.

What's in it for you? From Globoforce:

- **Inspire employee engagement:** Appreciation inspires emotional commitment and increased effort.
- **Retain top talent:** Recognize your employees, and they'll stay, grow, and thrive. You'll find it easy to attract talent, too.
- **Drive measurable business results:** The simple act of recognizing employees has a proven impact on your bottom line.



Recognition leads to engagement, which leads to successful talent management, which leads to prosperity, agrees HR blogger David Mizne. In **"7 More Fascinating Employee Engagement Trends for 2017,"** he cites an article by Gordon Tredgold, founder and CEO of Leadership Principles, **"Here's Why Recognition is the Key to Employee Engagement."**

"[Tredgold] shares that recognition is the key to employee engagement. That's a bold claim that he backs up with Gallup research:

Two-thirds of employees, who said they hadn't received any recognition in the last seven days, were twice as likely to say they would leave the company as the other workers when asked."

Building a culture of appreciation and engagement at your workplace yields happier, more satisfied employees, and that's good for your business. You'll attract the best workers, they'll stay with you longer, and they'll be more productive.

FIVE WAYS BUILDING A WORKPLACE CULTURE OF APPRECIATION BENEFITS YOU

Is building a culture of appreciation top of mind at your business?



If you aren't convinced yet, these five points illustrate why it should be. But don't just take our word for it; here's what employee-engagement experts have to say.

1. Creates a happier/more satisfied workforce.

Studies show that employees with high job satisfaction are generally more productive, engaged and loyal to their companies, notes Marci Martin, Business News Daily contributor, in **"12 Secrets to Keeping Employees Happy Without a Raise."** She quotes Jakki Liberman, president of Bumkins:

"Happy employees make for a happy company. Within the office, we'll publicly acknowledge accomplishments, provide a group lunch, reserve a prime parking space, or change a title. We'll also help employees to grow and develop, whether by taking on new desired responsibilities or challenges, taking courses to learn new skills, or furthering knowledge of the company by traveling on company business trips."



And Jonha Revesencio cites a University of Warwick study in a Fast Company article, **"Why Happy Employees Are 12% More Productive."** The study finds that while happiness led to a 12% productivity increase, unhappy workers were 10% less productive.

"As the research team put it, 'We find that human happiness has large and positive causal effects on productivity. Positive emotions appear to invigorate human beings.'"

Professor Andrew Oswald, one of three researchers who led the study, said investing in employee support and satisfaction tends to succeed in generating happier workers. At Google, employee satisfaction rose 37% as a result of those initiatives—suggesting that financial incentives aren't enough to make for highly productive employees."

She also observes that Shawn Achor, author of **The Happiness Advantage**, has found that the brain works much better when a person is feeling positive.

"At those times, individuals tend to be more creative and better at solving problems. And additional research has shown that when workers are happy they're more effective collaborators working toward common goals. As Achor sees it, the incentive for organizations is clear-cut—'happiness leads to greater levels of profits' for companies that take the right steps."



2. Helps attract employees.

Competition to attract and keep the best employees is intense, and rewards can help with recruiting efforts. In their book, **Leisure Services Management**, Amy R. Hurd, Robert J. Barcelona, and John T. Meldrum observe:

"Just as happy customers may be the best advertisement for a particular product, happy employees are often a great tool for recruiting new employees and making the organization a workplace of choice."

An organization that stands out from its competition as a great place to work can attract the best and brightest. This creates what the book calls "a virtuous circle whereby [the organization] becomes an even more attractive workplace." Establishing the right reward structure for an organization is critical to establishing a standout image.

And as many of our Blog posts point out, as an employer, you can create a successful, highly productive culture that values mutual respect, appreciation, teamwork, and work-life balance. (The three E's are engagement, encouragement, and environment.)

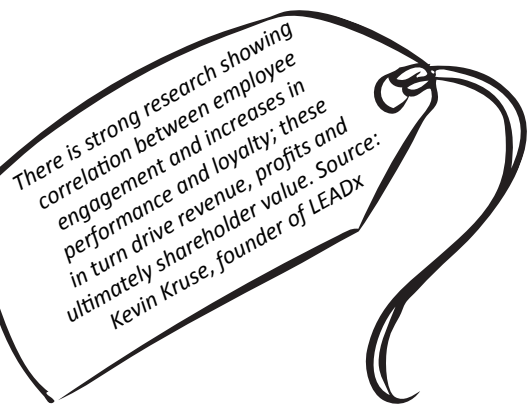
"If you manage your company culture intentionally, ... you will retain top talent and attract employees who want to stay engaged, work hard and lead meaningful, balanced lives."

3. Reduces turnover.

Globoforce CEO Eric Mosely, in **"3 Ways That Recognition Reduces Employee Turnover,"** says his company's recent **SHRM/Globoforce report** uncovered a solution to the rising turnover problem. It comes in the form of employee recognition, which more and more companies are implementing as the cornerstone of their strategies to build a best place to work.

4. Increases productivity.

"Research Shows Happy Employees Are More Productive" observes that if you show employees they're valued, they're more likely to have positive feelings about your company and their jobs. The post quotes Bain & Company partner Rob Markey in a Harvard Business Review blog post, **"Transform Your Employees into Passionate Advocates."**





"[It's] one more sign of the growing recognition that happy, engaged employees are more productive and generate better outcomes for their companies."

5. Protects your business.

"How can caring—employee engagement—not lead to better business results?" asks Kevin Kruse, a New York Times bestselling author of six books, including **Employee Engagement 2.0**, in an interview with Jathan Janove, principal of Janove Organization Solutions for **Business Management Daily**. Kruse adds:

"There is strong research showing correlation between employee engagement and increases in performance and loyalty; these in turn drive revenue, profits and ultimately shareholder value. To me this is tremendously obvious. A sales person who truly cares about organizational results will sell just as hard on a Friday afternoon as she would on a Monday."





FAILING TO RETAIN A KEY EMPLOYEE IS COSTLY

We can't emphasize enough the importance of building a culture of appreciation to reduce turnover. Employee retention/turnover continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing HR leaders today, according to the **SHRM/Globoforce Employee Recognition Survey**.

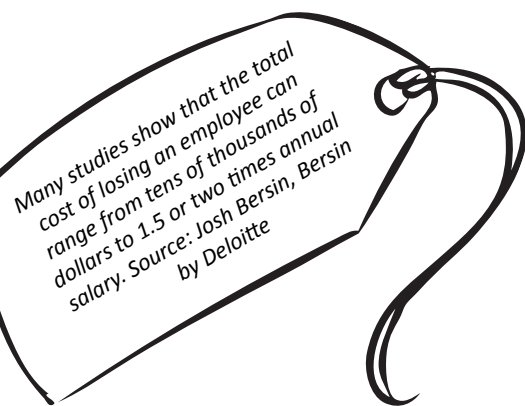
And in a LinkedIn post, **"Employee Retention Now a Big Issue: Why the Tide has Turned,"** Josh Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, observes: Many studies show that the total cost of losing an employee can range from tens of thousands of dollars to 1.5 or two times annual salary.

Consider the real "total cost" of losing an employee, he urges:

- Cost of hiring a new person (advertising, interviewing, screening, hiring)
- Cost of onboarding a new person (training, management time)
- Lost productivity (a new person may take 1-2 years to reach the productivity of an existing person)
- Lost engagement (other employees who see high turnover disengage and lose productivity)
- Customer service and errors (new employees take longer and are often less adept at solving problems). In healthcare, this may result in much higher error rates, illness, and other very expensive costs (which are not seen by HR)
- Training cost (over 2-3 years you are likely to invest 10-20% of an employee's salary or more in training, and that is gone)
- Cultural impact (whenever someone leaves others take time to ask "why?")

Most important of all, Bersin writes:

"... we have to remember that people are what we call an 'appreciating asset.' The longer we stay with an organization the more productive we get—we learn the systems, we learn the products, and we learn how to work together."



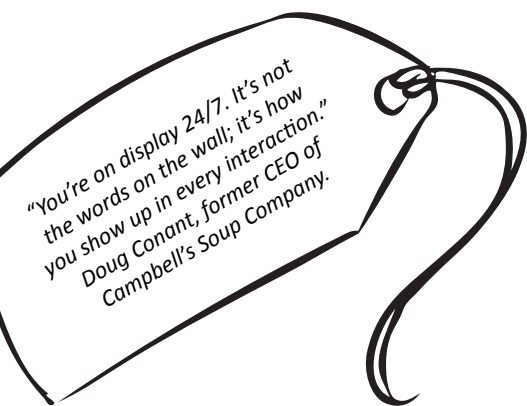


CHAPTER 3: HOW TO DO IT RIGHT

Research shows that an effective recognition and rewards program—which requires understanding who, what, and when to reward—can improve employees’ performance and your bottom line.

A CEB Corporate Leadership Council report cites Jim Brintnall, author of *What Makes a Good Recognition Reward?*, who uses the acronym SSMART to advise employers how to design an effective program. SSMART Rewards Programs:

- Support Organizational Goals and Values
- Sincere and Simple
- Meaningful
- Adaptable
- Relevant
- Timely



But, notes Robert Bradford, president and CEO of CSSP, Inc. on his [website](#), the improper use of rewards can have a debilitating effect on employee performance.

“Managers need to understand their employees’ perceptions of the importance and fairness of the reward and then clearly communicate what needs to be done to receive the reward.”

DETERMINE YOUR RECOGNITION STRATEGY

Your first challenge is to develop a recognition strategy that supports your business priorities and values. According to Roy Saunderson’s **“Top 10 Ways to Develop an Effective Recognition Program,”** you should create both a recognition purpose statement—define your reason for creating this plan—and a recognition philosophy statement outlining why you believe it’s important to your business.

To do that, it’s essential that you understand your organization’s culture.

- What’s unique about your workplace culture?
- What behaviors are important to strengthening your culture?
- What are the primary success factors for your company?



Armed with this knowledge you can develop a recognition and rewards strategy that reinforces the employee behaviors you want to see repeated. For example, if your company culture values collaboration, respecting others' opinions, and initiative, you should reward behaviors that demonstrate those shared values.

Once you've defined your employee appreciation strategy, you can determine the best tactics to achieve your recognition goals. Consider:

1. What business events—large and small—do you want to recognize? Which ones provide the best opportunities to strengthen your organizational culture?

Examples:

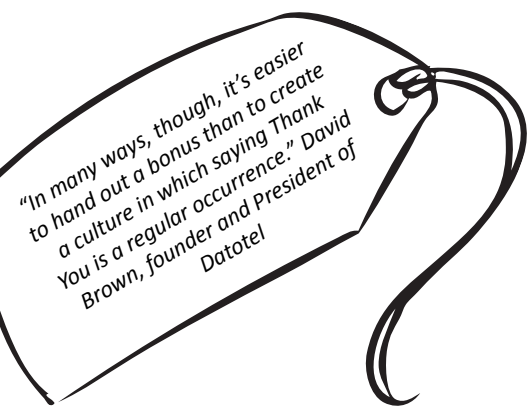
- Big sales or sales goals reached
- New hires
- Training completed
- Great customer service
- Collaboration
- Innovation, problem solving, and/or creativity

2. What other occasions are important to your company and meaningful to your employees? Examples:

- Life events, such as birthdays or years of service
- Firsts—first new account, sale, or perfect safety record
- Holidays
- Unique company traditions or events

3. Don't forget to reward teams as well as individuals. Examples:

- Project milestones
- Periodic team goals
- Project completion





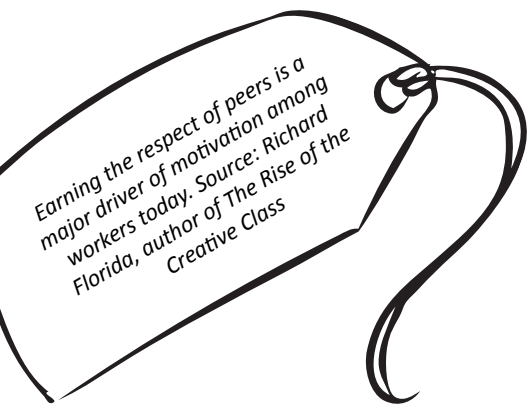
NEXT STEPS

DEFINE YOUR BUDGET

Based on your recognition/rewards plan and calendar, determine who (how many employees) you'll reward at each occasion. Be sure to include non-monetary as well as monetary awards and gifts.

Rhonda Sunnarborg, senior strategist and practice leader of channel marketing at MotivAction, in "How Much Should You Budget for Employee Recognition?" cites WorldatWork studies showing that while some organizations spend as much as 10% of payroll on employee recognition, the average budget is 2% of payroll, and the median amount is 1%. She writes:

"With this 1-2% benchmark in mind, you can begin to evaluate various recognition scenarios and see if your budget both supports your culture and provides meaningful awards to your employees."



Develop an annual recognition plan that meets your goals and fits your budget.

To inspire your planning and provide recognition and celebration ideas month by month, download our free, one-of-a-kind **Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar**.

It's important to involve frontline managers and workers—those for whom the plan is being designed—in creating your employee appreciation plan, emphasizes Kevin Kruse, author of the bestseller **Employee Engagement 2.0**. In "The Best Employee Engagement Strategy Is From The Bottom Up," he writes:

"The best employee engagement strategy is one where the organization surveys the employees at least annually, the results are shared with every manager, and in turn, each manager creates an action plan with her team members."

DETERMINE WHAT GIFTS BEST MEET YOUR RECOGNITION OBJECTIVES

Employees generally prefer rewards that are practical, meaningful, and useful. Gift cards and gift certificates, food, and event tickets are perennial favorites. Even when you have the luxury of a big budget or manage your program via a gift catalog, keep this in mind as you build out your gift-giving plan.



Non-monetary rewards—especially handwritten Thank You notes—are equally, if not more meaningful. Time off, flexible scheduling, professional development opportunities, even a special parking spot, show your appreciation and don't need to cost much, if anything. After all, what employees want most is to feel valued in your workplace.

Recognition trends come and go, but as Jane Sarles Larson, market research manager, ITA Group writes in **"4 Employee Recognition Ideas from the IRF 2017 Trends Study"**:

"... one thing remains: a strategic, results-focused program must be designed with the diversity of your workforce in mind to help everyone excel at work and reach for more."

One trend she reports from **The Incentive Research Foundation's 2017 Trends Study** stands out.

"Individualized experiences and emotion reign supreme: 42% of [those managing recognition programs] are increasing the number of 'experiential rewards' (e.g., spa days, concert tickets, expensive dinners, etc.) in their portfolios."

- In no uncertain terms, the study finds that emotional engagement is critical to program viability.
- Tapping emotional engagement through a strategic choice of rewards and incentives is a powerful way for businesses to motivate their stakeholders.
- From individual travel to merchandise experiences, the push toward individual experiences has blossomed throughout the industry, and there are no signs of that slowing down.
- Emotion is integral to a thriving program as well. When your audience falls in love with your campaign and your brand, you see the bottom-line result of an engaged team.

Note: Be sure to check with your tax attorney before employing any gifting plan as gifts might be taxable to recipients.





DON'T FORGET PEER-TO-PEER RECOGNITION

For both the recipient and the employees providing recognition and rewards, peer-to-peer (P2P) recognition is a powerful workplace tool for reinforcing your company culture and business success factors.

Businesses now understand that earning the respect of peers is a major driver of motivation among workers today, according to Richard Florida, author of **The Rise of the Creative Class**.

Recognition from management is critical, of course. But P2P recognition harnesses the intimate knowledge coworkers have of each other's work day to day.

There's an increasing interest in social or digital P2P programs, as HR guru Shawn Achor explores in the Harvard Business Review article, **"The Benefits of Peer-to-Peer Praise at Work."** Achor explains how Jet Blue, a company investing heavily in social P2P found:

"... for every 10% increase in people reporting being recognized, JetBlue saw a 3% increase in retention and a 2% increase in engagement."

P2P recognition needs institutional support to flourish, however. Unless your company provides the tools and guidelines for recognition—and management models it—employees are less likely to share their appreciation for coworkers.

MAKE IT FAIR

Regardless of what types of rewards you choose, it's important that employees don't view your recognition program as a "favoritism scheme."

As Marcus Erb, senior research partner and senior consultant with the Great Place to Work® Institute, warns in **"Four Ways to Foster Fairness in the Workplace,"**

"One of the fastest ways to erode a workplace's sense of fairness is by giving recognition unequally. This challenge can be especially difficult when managing employees across multiple sites."



If your recognition plan aligns with company culture and business strategies and you communicate clearly how it works—who is eligible, reward criteria, cost constraints—employees are more likely to perceive the program as fair, and as an incentive for hard work and goal accomplishment.

Phoenix-based McMurry, a marketing communications company, deftly negotiated this challenge after acquiring a second site, Erb writes. Faced with determining how to adapt their annual employee awards event in order to promote fairness, the company's leaders divided the event into two presentations, one at each site held in successive weeks. The events were coordinated so that when one location held its event, the other held a simultaneous celebration.





CHAPTER 4: BEST EMPLOYEE GIFTS

Everyone wants to feel valued—including your employees. Yet, it's not easy to find a gift that everyone appreciates—especially with a limited budget or a distributed workforce.

WHAT DO EMPLOYEES REALLY WANT?

What employees really want is your sincere appreciation for their work.

That's what it's all about. Giving gifts is a great way to show your appreciation, and any gift—no matter how inexpensive—if given personally, while letting recipients know why you're giving it, how sincere your gratitude for their hard work is, and how they've contributed to your organization's achievements, is bound to be meaningful.



Gifts are just the vehicle for expressing your appreciation and gratitude. So it's important to choose the right gifts—selected from the recipients' viewpoint, not yours—and present them in a meaningful way.

In terms of the gifts themselves, research shows employees prefer practical gifts they can share with family and friends. That's why gift cards and gift certificates are so popular.

What employees don't want are promotional items such as a pen, mug, or shirt with the company logo. As Derek Irvine, Globoforce's vice president of client strategy and consulting, blogs in **"Catalog Providers Hate Gift Cards Because Your Employees Love Them"**:

"In the latest Incentive magazine research ... 64% [of HR and recognition program managers] say gift cards are MORE effective than merchandise. That figure has grown up and up each year for the past several years.

IT'S ALL IN THE DELIVERY

If you do it right, whether you show your appreciation and gratitude with a gift of a Thanksgiving turkey or a handwritten Thank You note, your employees will appreciate your gratitude and it will have lasting effects. Deliver your gift personally

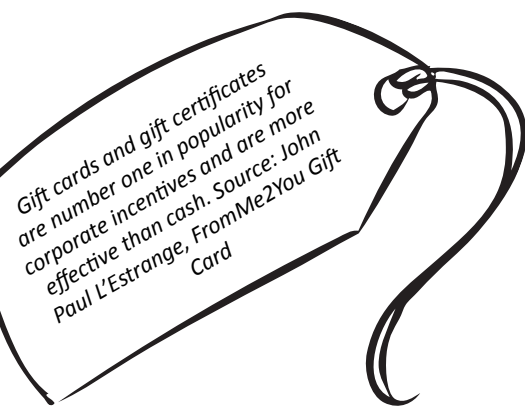


to employees, with a handshake, a smile, and a Thank You. If that's not possible, be sure to send your gift to employees with a thoughtful note of appreciation.

"I really do think handwritten notes are important," says Peter Handal, chairman and chief executive of Dale Carnegie Training. "In today's day and age we all communicate by texting and e-mail, and it's such an assumed way of doing things, but that makes a simple little handwritten note that much more meaningful."

After all, as Doug Conant, former Campbell's Soup CEO and the architect of a successful turnaround there says:

"You're on display 24/7. It's not the words on the wall; it's how you show up in every interaction."



You might want to check out our blog post featuring that quote, **"Putting the 'Thanks' in Thanksgiving."** It includes more from Conant and additional tips on gift delivery.

EMPLOYEES WANT GIFT CERTIFICATES AND GIFT CARDS!

Incentive magazine's study shows 8 out of 10 employees report their preference for gift cards or gift certificates over other incentives:

- They provide choice—employees can buy what they want when they want to.
- They empower—"My employer wants *me* to decide what I'd like."
- They can be shared with family and friends—a Thanksgiving turkey gift certificate lets your business provide the centerpiece of a holiday meal.

Employees associate their enjoyment of their gift certificate or card purchases with the value their employer places on their contributions. This feeling of value leads to happier, more productive employees.

MORE COMPELLING THAN CASH

Gift certificates and cards are number one in popularity for corporate incentives and are more effective than cash, asserts John Paul L'Estrange of FromMe2You Gift Card in **"Should You Give Cash, Gift Cards or Merchandise to Employees?"**



An Incentive Federation study, he notes:

"... consistently indicated that merchandise and travel related incentives were more attractive than cash—and in the merchandise category, gift cards were the most popular award items."

L'Estrange also reports:

- Roughly 3 out of 4 responding businesses agreed they could build a more exciting and memorable program using gift cards and gift certificates than using cash.
- More than 4 out of 5 respondents believe employees remember their gift card/certificate experiences longer than cash rewards.
- Gift cards and certificates provide a strong level of flexibility and versatility without the downsides of unwanted merchandise.



He also lists **10 core reasons gift cards and gift certificates are superior to giving cash:**

1. **Trophy Value**—A gift card/certificate purchase is more memorable, creating a lasting reminder of their achievements.
2. **Viral Value**—Employees will tell each other how they spent their gift cards and gift certificates.
3. **More Discreet**—It's more polite and socially acceptable to mention and discuss non-cash awards.
4. **True Gift Perception**—Employees don't view gift cards and gift certificates as part of their compensation plans. Cash is quickly viewed as compensation and disappears into the family budget.
5. **Universal Benefits**—Gift cards and gift certificates combine the benefits of merchandise with the benefits of cash. People prefer to choose how, when, and where to use their awards.
6. **Guilt-free Spending**—Recipients don't feel guilty about treating themselves.
7. **More Likely to Improve Work Performance**—Studies show cash doesn't improve work performance; thoughtful gifts of appreciation do.
8. **Family Support**—Since families are often involved in selecting awards, they're more likely to support the participant's goals.



9. **Pleasing Loved Ones**—There's a stronger motivation to earn an award for one's significant other or children.
10. **Long-Term Positive Feelings Towards Your Organization**—Chosen well, gift cards and gift certificates can reinforce positive associations with your company.

GIFTING TIPS

Tory Johnson, workplace contributor for Good Morning America and CEO of WomenForHire.com, lists her top-four employee gift tips in **Winning Workplace Gifts**:

1. **Cash, gift certificates and gift cards** always top the list of favorite gifts.
2. **Avoid anything too personal.** If you'd rather buy a gift over giving money, avoid overly personal gifts such as perfume, lingerie, liquor or religious items.
3. **Make a donation in your recipient's honor to the charity of your choice.** This is especially good if you need a non-cash idea or you don't want the value of your gift revealed.
4. **Remember, don't re-gift,** because you never know who will recognize that cute knick-knack you received last year.

OTHER PROVEN GIFT TYPES

Laura T. Coffey, contributing editor at NBC News' Today page, in her article, **"Office gift-giving: Pens good, body spray bad"** shares her own and several experts' best-gift tips:

- **The thoughtful, handwritten note.** A genuine note of thanks to each individual who helps you do your job well throughout the year is the best, most memorable gift of all.

For tips on writing a meaningful note, download our free eBook, **Put the "Thanks" in Thanksgiving: How to Write a Thanksgiving Letter to Employees**. Learn from today's workplace leaders how to write a memorable letter to employees at holiday time or *anytime* you wish to share your appreciation.

- **The practical gift.** Employees appreciate gifts they can use and share with family and friends.





- Food is always a favorite—a **turkey** for Thanksgiving, **fruit and veggies** for workplace wellness, **ice cream** for a summer treat, or **groceries** for anytime appreciation.
 - Gift cards and gift certificates for movies, sporting events, concerts—something the whole family can enjoy.
 - Nancy Soriano, a lifestyle expert and a spokeswoman for Office Depot, tells Coffey functional, practical presents are sure to be appreciated for months to come.
- **The team gift.** Let's say you regularly work with a team of people in another part of the country. Or let's say you and your direct co-workers really want to join forces and do something thoughtful for your boss, or for the team's administrative assistant, or for a valued client. Here's where the group gift can be a genius move. Soriano suggests:

"You can become a hero to that faraway team if you send the whole group something like a really nice coffeemaker along with a whole bunch of fun coffee and tea blends. Or, alternatively, you could gather a group of people—such as your team of direct coworkers—and make someone's day by presenting a gift from the whole group along with a card that everyone signs."

DO IT RIGHT!

Coffey says of employee gifts:

"Do it right, and you can make your boss, coworkers, clients and assistants beam with a warm and happy glow. Do it wrong, and—hoo-boy. Pray for:

- a) Mercy*
- b) Short memory spans."*



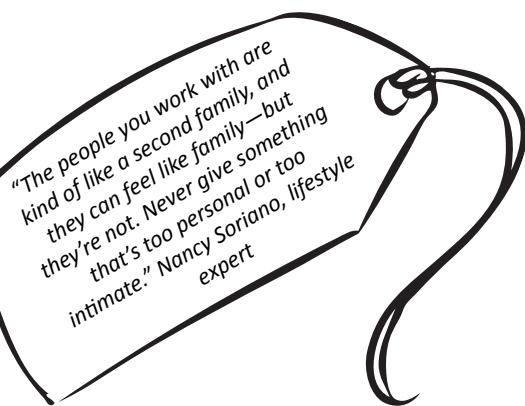
CHAPTER 5: POTENTIAL GIFT-GIVING PITFALLS

Certain gifting practices are fraught with peril. That goes for the rewards strategy itself and the gifts given. Words to keep in mind from Office Depot's Nancy Soriano:

"The people you work with are kind of like a second family, and they can feel like family—but they're not. Never give something that's too personal or too intimate."

STRATEGIC MISTAKES

1. **Do nothing.** Why would your employees give their best when they don't feel the best is given in return? Show your employees you care, and they'll work even harder and smarter.
2. **Waste time.** In many companies, employee morale and/or gift-giving committees have endless meetings trying to determine the perfect employee incentives from "company reward" catalogs. Employees generally don't want another pen with the company logo.
3. **Achieve little or no memory value.** Find a gift that's strongly related with your company values and expresses your gratitude.
4. **Assume one size fits all.** When you let your employees choose their own gifts you not only acknowledge their work throughout the year, you empower them to make their own decisions.
5. **Single employees out arbitrarily.** Those employees not nominated for recognition, and who don't understand the criteria for the bestowal of the reward, are generally negatively impacted by your employee recognition program.



GIFT CATEGORIES TO AVOID

Some types of gifts generally bomb, says Coffey:

"Small, thoughtful tokens of appreciation are ideal, gift-giving experts say; gifts that are too sensitive in nature, too personal, too expensive or even a teeny-tiny bit offensive are bad moves."



What might fall into the “too personal” or “too intimate” categories? Here are some generally agreed-upon no-no’s:

- **Perfume or cologne.** Don’t imply that you wished your colleague smelled better.
- **Clothing.** Aside from, say, a very, very safe shirt with a company logo ... but then, do you really want to venture a guess at someone’s size?
- **Gag gifts** or other presents that might strike you as hilarious but may not seem funny to others at all—especially if the comedy is tied to stereotypes or sexual innuendo.
- **Anything overtly religious.** Generally speaking, it’s safest to take a more secular “Happy Holidays” or “Wishing You a Wonderful New Year” approach at work.
- **Booze.** This choice is often too risky unless you know the recipient really well because *you just never know*.



Coffey notes Dale Carnegie’s Handel still cringes when he thinks of the champagne incident. A few years back he decided to treat his company’s top producers to a weekend getaway. As a special touch, he had nice bottles of champagne sent to each person’s room.

“There were 24 people there, and 23 thought it was wonderful,” he recalls. “But it turned out that one of the people was Muslim and did not drink alcoholic beverages. ... He was very gracious about it, and I didn’t offend him, but shame on me! It was very embarrassing.”



CHAPTER 6: GREAT EXAMPLES OF EMPLOYEE GIFT-GIVING

Whether your company is large and well-established or just getting started, if your budget is big or small, there are plenty of ways to show employees your appreciation and make them feel valued. Here are examples of great ways businesses are celebrating and rewarding employees.

RECOGNITION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EXPENSIVE

Employee appreciation doesn't have to be expensive. Try using simple but meaningful ways to recognize your employees—and to help them recognize each other.

Our favorite forms of low-cost recognition—a manager's attention and appreciation along with a thoughtful note of gratitude—are always welcomed. We can't stress enough the power of a sincere Thank You in the workplace.

Even the largest organizations find their most affordable recognition programs to be among their most effective.

Hewlett-Packard, Palo Alto, Calif.

Hewlett-Packard presents inventive employees with the Golden Banana Award. It's one of the company's most prestigious honors. It's affordable and effectively rewards innovation, one of the organization's core values. It also has a great origin story.

One day a company engineer burst into his boss's office with the answer to a problem they'd been struggling with for weeks. The manager searched his office for a way to mark this accomplishment, but all he came up with was a leftover banana from lunch. Still, he handed over the banana and said "Well done! Congratulations!"

Such events do more than simply reward employees, as Robert Nelson, author of **1,001 Ways to Reward Employees**, told the New York times: Employees get



recognition and the company gets goodwill. The banana story has become part of Hewlett-Packard's oral tradition.

"People tell the story," Nelson says. "You get the power of a story retold."

Each time the story is told, it illustrates Hewlett-Packard's culture of innovation—a recognition award created on the spot—and appreciation—gift-giving to reinforce that spirit of innovation. And the tradition connects recipients to the company's history and its core values, to something larger than themselves or their individual actions.

AT&T Universal Card Services, Jacksonville, Fla.

AT&T's peer-to-peer World of Thanks recognition program is one of its most popular. To help create a culture of appreciation and higher performance, the program encourages anyone in the company to write and send a message of thanks to someone else in the company who inspires them or has helped them along the way. All employees have globe-shaped pads of colored paper for this purpose, and in four years, workers have written more than 130,000 Thank You notes.

Walt Disney World, Orlando, Fla.

One of the most coveted employee rewards—among Disney's 180 recognition programs—is the Spirit of Fred Award. It's named for Fred, an employee who advanced through the ranks by exemplifying Disney's core values of being friendly, resourceful, enthusiastic and dependable. Fred makes each award plaque, which other workers who live Disney's values receive. Star recipients also receive the Lifetime Fred Award, a bronze statuette of Mickey Mouse.

Producers Assistance Corporation, Houston, Texas

Employee safety is critical at Producers Assistance, which provides contract workers to the oil and gas industries. Seeing a need to improve safety, the company began rewarding eligible employee actions, such as attending a safety meeting, by loading points to reloadable gift cards.

It's been successful—after a six-month trial, safety lapses called incident rates had declined significantly. Employees were excited about earning points—program participation had doubled.



Pharmaceutical Merger

Before a merger of two large pharmaceutical companies, an employee task force worked nonstop for six months to plan the blending of operations. Post-merger, the new organization rewarded the team with the gift of time. The personalized cards, hand-delivered with a letter from the project leader, gave recipients their choice of services: housecleaning, lawn care, carpet cleaning, pest control, and more.

Team members loved the gifts. The assistance with day-to-day tasks let them enjoy much-needed downtime and demonstrated how much the company appreciated their exemplary efforts. What an incentive to go the extra mile in the future!

BIG-BUDGET THANK YOU INITIATIVES

If your business does have the resources, you might consider something like these employee Thank You initiatives, which Entrepreneur's Rose Leadem describes in **"These Leaders Take Employee Appreciation to the Next Level."**

Bertch Cabinet, Waterloo, Iowa

After its employees met their 2016 sales goals, Bertch Cabinet's president, Gary Bertch, took all 800 on a Caribbean cruise. The company began taking annual winter trips in 1989, first to Acapulco, then cruises for several years, and even a Hawaii vacation. Then in 2005 sales fell, and stayed weak beyond the recession. Now sales have rebounded and the cruises are back, letting employees escape the cold Iowa winter for a week.

"We just tried to get all of our people pumped up a little more to achieve the various goals, both customer-oriented goals and financial goals," Bertch told the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier.

Boxed, New York, N.Y.

Chieh Huang, CEO of bulk shopping app Boxed, wants to help make his employees' lives easier. He also wants them to stay with his company, knowing how arduous and expensive turnover is. His way of doing so? He shows workers his gratitude for their hard work and commitment by helping them navigate expensive life events.

First he committed to paying college tuition for all of his employees' children through a nonprofit he funded with his own money and company stock. He expects the fund to grow as more children reach college age.



Then, after finding out that an employee was working double shifts with an ill mother at home just to cover upcoming wedding expenses, he offered to pay for 26-year-old Marcel Graham's wedding. He also announced that he'll pay for all employees' future weddings.

"It was overwhelming that Boxed would pay for my wedding. I was in tears, and so was my fiancée," says Marcel Graham in a company statement announcing the new benefit. "It just makes me feel that they appreciate my work here."

Hari Krishna Exports (HK), Mumbai, India

To recognize great worker performance over the last five years, Savji Dholakia, owner of Hari Krishna Exports gifted 1,260 cars and 400 apartments to his employees as Diwali gifts (the Hindu festival of lights) in October 2016.

He wants not only to show his appreciation, but to make sure all employees' life needs are met. It's altruism, but also makes good business sense. Who can focus on work when worrying about shelter or transportation?

"Our aim is that each employee must have his own home and car in the next five years," he says.

Dholakia been awarding employees like this since 2012.

YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

Lastly, the recent blog post, "**Employee Appreciation Day: How 2 Companies Make It Last,**" outlines how the Aveda Institute Des Moines and Rivers Casino in Pittsburgh succeed with the help of year-round employee recognition.

Aveda Institute, Des Moines, Iowa

"We treat them how we want to be treated, and it just works," Jana Van Polen, co-owner of Aveda Institute Des Moines, tells the Des Moines Register. "We create this culture that allows employees to find their true worth and find potential they never knew they had."

In addition to benefits like paid volunteer time and a biennial wellness and development summit, the Aveda Institute throws a formal staff-appreciation party every January.



The party is costly for the company, “but it’s such a morale booster that we can’t live without it,” co-owner (and Jana’s husband) Doug Van Polen says.

Significantly, the company reinforces the theme of employee appreciation so it “carries through the rest of the year,” too. April King, Aveda’s director, attributes the company’s motivated culture to good communication and daily demonstrations of gratitude.

“Daily, we shout out what we love, and we respect each other enough to have open communication. When you can have tough-subject conversations in a light manner and work together to accomplish something, it’s meaningful,” she says.

Rivers Casino, Pittsburgh, Penn.

Rivers Casino has been named one of Pittsburgh’s top workplaces two years in a row and was also voted best for making employees feel genuinely appreciated, according to the **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**.

How does the casino do it? It’s no easy task: the casino employs 1,700 and is open round the clock. So, showing appreciation is “not always monetary,” general manager Craig Clark says. “It’s a work-life balance.”

One of the difficulties in managing the casino is being open 24/ 7. Employees have to work nights, holidays and weekends. So, extra recognition at the holidays is key.

“Recognizing the stress that comes with working during the holiday season, the casino offers employees traditional hams and turkeys to take home for their families,” the Post-Gazette’s Mike Danielewski reports.

It doesn’t stop there. Year-round appreciation efforts include:

- employee raffles
- rewards for attendance and good work
- onsite free massages
- tuition reimbursement

Listening is also a big part of the engagement strategy. Casino management encourages employee feedback through discussions and team-member surveys.



Take it from one of the employees, who noted in a survey response: “The leadership team stays involved with the team members and shows genuine interest in the engagement of everyone, keeping them informed and listening to their concerns.”

RECOGNITION CASE STUDIES

Numerous other organizations offer effective employee rewards programs that help meet their goals. Here are a few detailed examples of successful employee gift-giving in action.

Pret A Manger Values Employee Engagement

U.K.-based fast casual sandwich shop Pret A Manger has been in business 30 years and just keeps growing. According to **Fortune**, the company’s total sales for 2016 jumped 15% to £776.2 million (\$996 million), with U.S. sales climbing 14% to go over \$200 million for the first time. Pret “has notched consistent revenue growth for over a decade as it opens additional shops, generates more sales during breakfast and snacking times, and markets itself as a purveyor of ‘clean’ foods — which is on trend with what many consumers say they want from their restaurants today.”

But the real secret to Pret A Manger’s success is how it treats employees, and by extension, customers. It’s a happy place to work, Pret A Manger’s director of people, Andrea Wareham, tells **The Guardian**:

“We get lots of feedback from customers via social media, commenting on the positive experiences that people have when they go into a Pret. ‘I went into Pret today and your team member did this for me or that for me’, so there’s this huge wealth of anecdotal feedback ...

I think a lot of companies will talk about customer service. But we start before that. We create the happy team so that everything else flows.”

“Eighty percent of our managers start as team members. If you invest in your people, if you put your absolute focus on that part of your business, then everything else flows. To any small business, I’d say you have to put your money where your mouth is. Don’t have a shiny office, don’t have the lovely Apple Mac computers, don’t do any of that. A traditional company will spend 7% of their turnover on marketing, but we spend 1% and we invest everything in our people.”



Pret A Manger rewards excellence to motivate employees, The Guardian's Peter Moore writes:

The company uses staff reward schemes. Every shop has a mystery shopper visit each week, who is looking for engagement with a team member. If the mystery shopper has a good experience, team members get an extra £1 an hour for the hours they have worked for the week. Eighty percent of ... shops get the bonus every week.

There are other performance nudges, too. For a particularly good example of customer service — helping a parent through the door with a pram for instance — team members are rewarded with Outstanding Cards, which translate into £50 rewards.

There are also perks for the customers. One such initiative is the Joy of Pret which allows staff to give away free drinks to returning or deserving customers. Ben Rogers, a 21-year-old trainee manager, says these perks make customers happy, which in turn makes the staff happy.

Datotel Builds a Culture of Employee Appreciation

Nadine Heintz, a senior editor at Inc. Magazine, details how **Datotel** overhauled its employee appreciation, recognition, and incentive programs:

David Brown thinks it's important to make his employees feel valued. So Brown, founder and president of Datotel, an IT services and data storage business in St. Louis with 38 employees, was dismayed when he realized his employee-of-the-month program wasn't helping morale.

It seems like a simple concept: Make employees feel appreciated, and they will work harder and be more loyal. But there's often a disconnect between the type of appreciation employees want and what their managers think they want.

Though a decent bonus will always be a highly coveted form of recognition, employers often underestimate the degree to which workers value kind words delivered face to face. That may sound like good news for companies looking for inexpensive ways to show appreciation to employees. In many ways, though, it's easier to hand out a bonus than to create a culture in which saying Thank You is a regular occurrence.



Brown admits an employee-of-the-month program seemed like the least time-consuming way to make sure his staff continued to feel appreciated as Datotel grew. Based on information gleaned from employees during informal conversations, however, he realized a less rigid, more personal approach was in order. To encourage his eight-person management team to get in the habit of reporting employee accomplishments, he set aside part of his daily morning phone call with senior executives to discuss exemplary work, in addition to 15 minutes in the middle of each weekly management meeting. When an employee did something praiseworthy, Brown encouraged someone other than his or her direct manager to say Thank You in person.

Brown also made a conscious effort to thank employees several times a week, often through handwritten notes mailed to their homes. "At a tech company, it's all too easy to just write emails," he says. "It takes time to sit down and write out a note, but it goes a long way."

Stephanie Lewis, an engineer who joined Datotel three years ago, was pleasantly surprised to find a note from Brown in her mailbox this past June. In the note, handwritten on Datotel stationery, Brown noted Lewis had been praised during several recent management meetings for working closely with a customer and thanked her for her hard work. "It made me feel important to get something so personal and unique, especially since I'm sure David has several hundred other things swirling around in his head," Lewis says.

Zoosk.com's Gift-giving Success

Thinking beyond—or in addition to—the checkbook when giving employee gifts lets staff members know they're appreciated, writes Inc. Magazine's Sara Hottman in **"How to Choose a Holiday Gift for Your Staff,"** excerpted here:

"We work hard, we play hard," says Paul Vagadori, senior human resources director for San Francisco-based Zoosk.com, an online dating community.

"Our group is very hard-working in a fast-paced environment. We want to show we care, we appreciate, we value the above-and-beyond they go to, and we want to show them we're willing to invest time and money for what they do."

Business owners say involving the group in a gift boosts worker morale, and the most all-inclusive gift is a holiday party. Zoosk.com throws several holiday parties, starting with a Thanksgiving potluck where the company provides the main dishes and its 70 employees bring a special dish.



"It's a family gathering of sorts, especially for the international folks," Vagadori says. "We wrap some tradition into it as well so they can see how we celebrate here in the States."

In the middle of December, the company throws a casual, beer-and-chips party for employees, followed up by a more formal event at a posh location at the end of the month. Employees can bring dates and the company stocks the venue with TVs, Wii games and gambling tables. A professional photographer captures everyone at the party, and on the way out, everyone gets a photo in a brushed-nickel frame. "It's little things, but it's little things that make the big deal," Vagadori says.

Another meaningful gift is time off—extra free days around the holidays, or as an excursion gift. Vagadori says Zoosk.com gives generous time off around the holidays so employees don't have to take personal days to enjoy the holidays. Also, the company gives employees merit-based year-end bonuses that aren't associated with the holidays, but conveniently come around the gift-giving period.

Token gifts—items that don't cost much but are useful, not clutter—supplement the intangible gift of a fun time at a company party. This year Zoosk.com's token gift will probably be an insulated travel mug with the company logo. "It's not meant to be a huge dollar amount, but it's nice, not cheap and tinny. It's worthwhile to invest and get a nice one for everybody," Vagadori says. "And it has a dual purpose—it's environmentally friendly so we're not burning through cups for water and coffee."

Giving gifts of parties, corporate yearbooks or special time off are appreciated, business owners say, but add that giving employees an avenue to donate food and gifts to charities during the holiday is another morale-boosting gift.

"It helps with morale on another end," Vagadori says. Zoosk.com does a giving tree where employees buy gifts for a needy family. The company also collects food for a food bank, "with a healthy competition over who can bring in the most weight in food," he says. "This way, individuals who work in a nice environment, and who are happy to have jobs can give back. It's nice to be on the giving end."

As you choose your staff's holiday gifts, use creativity—it saves money, keeps uniformity, and adds an element of fun to cap the work year.



READY TO START RECOGNIZING EMPLOYEES YEAR-ROUND?

Download your FREE gThankYou! **Day-to-Day Employee Recognition Calendar**, your guide to building a successful workplace culture of positivity and gratitude.

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Holiday-time or anytime is the perfect time to share your heartfelt appreciation for employees.

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