



February 2008

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Focus

A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group

Recognizing Employees

Recognizing people is a powerful motivational tool, second only to pay in the business world. People all have a fundamental need to be recognized in two areas, for what they do (accomplishments) and for who they are. Also, sometimes it's best to recognize someone individually, and sometimes recognizing a group is most appropriate. Recognition methods range from informal to formal, and from free to expensive. This article covers employee recognition programs that are simple to carry out and are not expensive.

Individual Recognition

Celebrating individual accomplishments and milestones builds loyalty and makes an employee want to commit a greater percentage of his or her total ability to the company. The following ideas are divided based on cost.

No-Cost Recognition

- A**d hoc: Write a brief note (Good job on project X!) on the back of your business card and give it to the employee
- W**ritten praise on personal or business stationery
- W**rite a personal note on a person's paycheck envelope or stub
- E**-mail acknowledgement
- V**erbal praise or a sincere "Thank you"

Low-Cost Recognition

- W**rite a note using preprinted folded cards with a word or phrase (Bravo!, You done good!, etc.) on the front
- C**offee mug with a word or phrase (The Extra Mile Award, Barrier Buster, Mountain Mover, etc.)
- B**uy a book on a subject the employee will like, write a short personal note on

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this inside cover, and mail the book to the employee's home.

Flowers or candy flower arrangements. These can be obtained locally or via the Internet.

Gifts with the company name/logo. Among the most popular are: Drinking glasses (individual or a set), insulated coffee mugs, ice chests, stadium chairs, umbrellas, gym bags, pen-and-pencil sets, leather goods, and clothing from t-shirts to cold-weather coats.

Unusual headgear, like a safari hat, can be used to recognize exceptional behavior (pathfinding, employee mentoring, overcoming obstacles, etc.)

Gift "baskets." These may or may not actually include anything resembling a woven container with a handle. The floral department of a supermarket can prepare a custom gift package that includes anything the store sells, which allows for a wide range of items, not to mention a wide range of taste, or lack thereof. These gifts can be a lot of fun, and may also be used for a small group. Call ahead to the store and pick it up later.

Acknowledge employee anniversaries with the company. Include the first, second, and third anniversaries because people change jobs frequently nowadays.

Monthly birthday party recognizing all employees with a birthday that month

Paid time off (two hour lunch, afternoon, three day weekend)

Annual awards using pre-defined criteria. In the most successful of these, employees nominate candidates and a committee selects the recipients. These awards may recognize professional excellence, teamwork, supporting others (internal customer service), community service, helping other employees develop new skills, customer problem solving, and keeping spirits high. Look for the opportunity to name an award after a former employee who exemplified the appropriate behavior.

Monetary gifts

- Gold-tone U.S. dollar coin. Keep a bunch handy for ad hoc rewards, or as a tool to energize a meeting. Trust me on this: Until you have seen it happen, it's hard to believe how much earning a \$1 prize delights grown men and women.
- Use a \$2 bill for creative or unusual accomplishments
- Gift cards for fast food restaurants ('You deserve a break today')
- Restaurant gift certificates, or gift cards accepted anywhere
- U.S. saving bonds (sold at a discount to face value, so the value appears greater than the cost)

More Expensive Recognition

Rent a sports car for the person to drive for a week

If a married employee works particularly long hours for a while, send a gift to his or her spouse and/or children

"Bird Dog" cash rewards for employees who refer potential employees hired

and pay cash rewards for employees who refer potential employees hired by the company. While many companies defer this payment until the new hire has been employed for some time, I think the reward should be paid when the person is hired. Deferring the payment reduces the impact, and besides, it's management's responsibility to make hiring decisions.

Group Recognition

Recognizing group accomplishments increases workgroup cohesion and improves productivity.

Low-Cost Recognition

Paid time off. A little makes the point, and this can be effectively no-cost if the reward is based on achieving a predetermined goal.

Celebrate a noteworthy event (company or group accomplishment, new customer/client, or industry award) with an impromptu champagne celebration. Write the date and reason on the champagne cork and start a cork collection.

Besides champagne, other foods or beverages can be used, and are most effective when they are out of the ordinary, like root beer or ginger ale, ice cream treats, or fresh gourmet-style cookies.

Mid-Cost Recognition

Meals. Everybody likes food, and the meal can be breakfast, lunch, or dinner, at the office, job site, or elsewhere. Meals can be catered, cooked on site, or "pot luck." For extra fun, use a food theme that connects with something related to the business or a project. The theme could reflect a food type, or ethic menu, or something more fanciful. For example, a seafood theme could be chosen for a project near the coast.

Hire a masseuse to give employees 15 minute massages

Gift certificates for services, like automotive detailing or a manicure

Finally, when recognizing accomplishments, setting the right goals and behavioral standards is critical. This article is concerned with the "how" of recognition; identifying the "what" is more important and should be carefully considered. For example, rewarding speed at the expense of quality is often unprofitable in the long run. Look past the obvious to at least the second-order effects of any recognition/reward program to ensure you truly want the behavior you reward, because that's what you'll get.

Tom Wagner

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