

HR MAGAZINE

How Do You Say 'Thank You' to Employees?

Feedback

Simple gestures, rubber chickens and food are some ideas.

By John Scorza

There's no denying it. Work can be a grind. You put in a lot of blood, sweat and sometimes tears, and it often seems like no one notices.

In honor of this month's focus on giving thanks, we wanted to know what HR can do to boost employees' spirits and let them know they are truly appreciated. We asked you to share your suggestions. It turns out that simple gestures may be the best way to make someone's day.



A Daily Thank-You

The one mainstay in my bag of ideas is to say a simple "thank you" at the end of the day to those you manage. I learned this from a man who understood human nature better than anyone I ever knew: Mayor Peter Torigian of the city of Peabody, Mass. I served as director of human resources under the mayor. The lessons he taught me about appreciation of others' efforts have stayed with me through the years. Two to three times a week he would spend about 30 minutes in different areas of City Hall to say hello and to thank each employee. If someone was not in the office, he would leave a note saying "thank you" in his unique scrawl. Sometimes he would leave beautiful flowers that he grew in his garden on someone's desk along with a thank-you note. Each night, if he left before I did, he would come by or yell from the other side of the hall, "Thank you, Cindy, see you tomorrow!" He was a master at making people feel important and appreciated. All of these efforts never cost a cent! I believed then and still believe many years later that employee appreciation should be a daily event and not saved for a "special day." That alone will bring satisfaction to employees.

—Cynthia R.H. King, SHRM-CP, director of human resources, Institute for Health and Recovery, Cambridge, Mass.



Rubber Chickens

When I became president of KFC at PepsiCo, I started giving away floppy rubber chickens and \$100. It ignited performance because people respond to recognition—and it's fun. When you recognize people, it says that you're watching them, what they do matters. It keeps employees motivated and excited to come to work every day. People would sometimes cry when I gave them their chickens.

—David Novak, executive chairman, Yum Brands, Louisville, Ky.



Frequent Thanks

It's not a one-time event but rather a habit of active listening and championing. I thank my work family by making praise personal and frequent.

—James Carchidi, CEO, The JFC Staffing Cos., Harrisburg, Pa.



Gift Choices

Employees probably wouldn't need a big token to feel appreciated if they got affirmation, pats on the back and verbal thank-yous frequently. My company used to give out things like pens, paperweights and crystal vases for various years of service. Now employees can choose from a catalog of items based on the service level. It's a big improvement, as people can now pick items they could actually use. However, I would gladly give up a service award every five years if I felt valued and appreciated on a regular basis.

—Lorianne Lee, HR project manager and recruiter, Cityteam, San Jose, Calif.



5

Handwritten Notes

I always send a handwritten note right after an employee completes an assignment. I include a comment that praises one or more key strengths that the person demonstrated. I end with a statement of how the company has changed for the better because of that individual. A lot of companies “talk the talk” about recognizing employees, but a handwritten note “walks the walk” and demonstrates a true caring attitude for others and what they do. I know several people who have saved—and framed—their thank-you notes.

—Karen Zupanic, SHRM-SCP, vice president, J. Preston Automation, McKinney, Texas



6

Thank You to the Family

My favorite gesture is a note to the employee’s family to thank them for their support of the worker, which has enabled that person to succeed. I like to include a small Starbucks or other gift card for the employee. I pay for this myself, since being reimbursed by the company could seem less sincere. By including their families, the workers know that, while at times they may be needed for longer hours, their efforts haven’t gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

—Rebecca Wrage, area director of human resources, Mid-Plains Community College, North Platte, Neb.

7

Employee Appreciation Day

As an intern at a small business, I organized the company’s first-ever Employee Appreciation Day. The work crew had helped finish construction at several out-of-town sites. Their hard work and flexibility helped to ensure completion of the jobs on time. These projects involved stressful deadlines and pressure to ensure the utmost accuracy—all while

Feedback

being out of state or several hours away from home. We rewarded them with a half-day of paid time to enjoy games, food, prizes and fun with their families, with the company's owners serving them. Not only was it something they'd never had before, but it was an opportunity for me to learn.

—Carisa Sechrist, HR intern, House to Home Properties, Youngstown, Ohio

[**SHRM members-only toolkit:** [Managing for Employee Retention \(www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingforemployeeeretention.aspx?_ga=2.69313490.392341852.1542637908-1778139990.1486570561\)](http://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingforemployeeeretention.aspx?_ga=2.69313490.392341852.1542637908-1778139990.1486570561)]



Employee Appreciation Week

We are a nonprofit organization serving senior citizens, and our employees don't make as much money as they could elsewhere. It is critical that we show them that what they do is important and appreciated. Rather than focus on individual job titles (such as Nurses Day or Administrative Professionals Day), we wanted to recognize every one of our employees through an Employee Appreciation Week. Each department director sponsored a different day of the week. We held events at various times throughout the day, so even those working different hours could get in on some of the fun, including a trivia contest, ice cream sundaes, mini-massages and more. Our budget is small. But what little money we did spend had a great return on good will and improved morale. We are actually continuing the mini-massage each Friday afternoon.

—Mary Hofacker, human resources director, Licking County Aging Program, Newark, Ohio



Personalized Thanks

The thank-you should depend on the individual employee and the company culture. A note or certificate might work for some employees and companies, while a spot award or gift card presented in a team or group meeting might be more effective for others. Whatever the thanks may be, it should be noted on the employee's performance appraisal so it's not forgotten at review time.

—Charlene Bayne, independent career consultant/HR coach, Drexel Hill, Pa.



E-Mail to Direct Supervisors

I make it a point to tell direct supervisors or senior staff when an employee accomplishes a significant task or project. Usually it's in the form of an e-mail, and I cc: the employee. It is amazing how effective this form of thank-you can be.

—David McKale, SHRM-SCP, director of risk services, The Hawaii Group, Honolulu

11

Public Recognition

Our company has 62 locations and more than 4,000 employees in the U.S. and Canada, so reaching everyone can be tricky. During the month, our workers e-mail me their “Way to Go” nominations. Anyone in the organization can be chosen—co-workers, supervisors, subordinates, etc. Common nominations are for going the extra mile, generating positive customer comments, helping a co-worker with a project or difficult task, recognizing a good boss. I send out a companywide e-mail that includes who was selected and why, and one person’s name is randomly drawn for a \$50 Visa gift card. Everyone likes to “see their name in lights,” and it’s a great way to encourage employees to make a difference in one another’s lives.

—Heather Beall, SHRM-SCP, director of human resources, Jack Cooper, Kansas City, Mo.



12

Company Picnic

We host an annual employee picnic. I grill all the hamburgers and hot dogs for the employees, and the marketing department coordinates the side dishes and drinks. People are welcome to come and go as they please, and most attend on their lunch break.

—Jimmy Proffitt, human resources manager, Old Mill Square, Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

13

Monthly Events

Choose a different event to hold each month—like buying all the employees bags of chips and holding a Vote for Your Favorite Flavor Day. Have a chili cook-off between departments or an Ice Cream Truck Day with free ice cream for all employees. Make it different each time. Show some effort. They know when management truly cares. And then they will care about their jobs that much more! Plus, it’s fun!

—Justin Jonas, regional HR consultant, Greystone Health Network, Columbus, Ohio

14

‘Ministry Of Fun’

We have implemented the “Ministry of Fun” within the HR department to announce activities, new videos, gifts, early releases and events. The ministry organizes onsite events such as an ugly holiday sweater contest or a Red Sox beard contest. Employees at other locations send in pictures so they can participate as

well. The CEO and other senior managers act as judges. The ministry also sends out funny YouTube videos and hires an ice cream or cupcake truck to come to the office. We send out small gifts on Mother's Day or Father's Day and have a brunch for employees. When an employee gets an e-mail from the Ministry of Fun, it brings a smile to their face. It's one e-mail that never goes unopened!

—Helen H. Topor, senior vice president/human resources director, Salem Five Bank, Salem, Mass.



15

Little Surprises

I write e-mails and notes and plan little surprises that I know my staff will appreciate (giving them money to get their favorite candy bar, bringing in doughnuts). My department wouldn't run effectively without my team, and I want to make sure they feel valued.

—Anna Reilly, RPO manager, TriStarr Staffing, Lancaster, Pa.

John Scorza is associate editor of HR Magazine.

Feedback

HR DAILY NEWSLETTER

News, trends and analysis, as well as breaking news alerts, to help HR professionals do their jobs better each business day.

Email Address

CONTACT US (WWW.SHRM.ORG/ABOUT-SHRM/PAGES/CONTACT-US.ASPX) | 800.283.SHRM (7476)

© 2020 SHRM. All Rights Reserved

SHRM provides content as a service to its readers and members. It does not offer legal advice, and cannot guarantee the accuracy or suitability of its content for a particular purpose.

Disclaimer (www.shrm.org/about-shrm/Pages/Terms-of-Use.aspx#Disclaimer)

