



21 Ways To Applaud Success

Businesses that are able to keep motivated employees generally have a strategic, competitive advantage over the competition. Here are 21 ways to let your employees know they count.

By Carol Hacker

Many business owners overlook the use of low-cost or no-cost incentives as a way to let employees know they are appreciated. Why? Some think recognizing employees or applauding success means spending a lot of money. Not true! Others believe they are paying employees to do a job and, therefore, should not have to acknowledge achievements or mark milestones.

These 21 ideas are designed to challenge your creative senses. Get your employees involved and find out how they want to be recognized. Don't assume incentives that get seniors and Baby Boomers fired up will get your Generation X and Y employees excited. Totally different things motivate them.

There are three basic principles for recognizing and rewarding employees:

- Isolated reinforcement of specific behavior has little motivational impact. It must be an on-going process to be effective.
- For any reward system to have an impact on employee performance, it must be a part of a work environment that is rewarding as a whole.
- The use of fear, intimidation, threats and power of authority may be a way to get your employees' attention, but these tactics often meet with resistance, reluctance, animosity and sometimes even sabotage.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter accurately sums up the idea of employee reward, recognition and retention with the following: "Compensation is a right, recognition is a gift."

1. Welcome new hires by preparing for their first days on the job. Make sure their workspaces have whatever they will need to get off to a good start. Show them the restroom, the break room and how to use the telephone and cash register. Consider assigning a "buddy" to help them learn the ropes. This is an experienced employee

who volunteers to be a mentor. The word "volunteer" is critical to the success of this assignment. Anyone who doesn't want to be a mentor should not be forced into it. Don't forget the training you provide can make or break the relationship between you and your employee. Employees who understand expectations as well as job basics have a much higher probability of being successful.

2. Offer a "Green Thumb" award that employees can give one another or supervisors and customers can award to employees. The "Green Thumb" is a sticker with a green thumb pointing up. Some employees will apply the stickers to their name badges or stick them to their aprons. Employees as well as their supervisors can submit nominations via E-mail or hard copy with a brief description of why the award is deserved. Customers can also give employees a pre-printed "Thumbs Up" card that employees can redeem for points that can be used for gifts or incentives.

3. Focus on the results, not the rules. Do not punish employees by constantly reminding them about the rules and regulations. The results of their efforts are usually more important than how they reached their goals. Owners and managers who fail in this area are hard pressed to keep turnover under control.

4. Write personal notes to employees on the backs of their paycheck envelopes. It is a simple yet effective way to show employees how much you appreciate them. A business owner started this practice after his employees complained that management seldom did anything to recognize their accomplishments. He gave his managers a budget with which to work and challenged them to brainstorm ideas on how to let employees know they count. One manager came up with the

idea of the personal note. It cost nothing but their time to write the notes! The employees, who used to quickly rip open their paycheck envelopes to make sure the payroll department had paid them correctly, were now eager to turn the envelope over to see what their managers wrote.

5. Send a "thank you" letter to your employees' children. The text might read something like this: "Please accept my sincere appreciation for the support you have given to your mother (father) in her (his) work with our business. I'm fortunate to have her (him) on my team and want you to know how lucky you are to have her (him) as your parent." This letter could also be adapted for a spouse or a spouse and children. If the employee is a teenager who lives at home, you could send a letter to his ♦



Top: Even if it's a simple "thumbs up," find some way to let employees know they count at your store. **Bottom:** Writing thank you notes to employees for exceptional work is a free, easy way to show your appreciation.



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or her parents. This is such a simple idea, but it can make a huge difference in the employee's attitude toward you and the job.

6. Award the privilege of an extra 15 minutes for lunch when an employee

goes above and beyond or the team meets or exceeds a goal. If the lunch is typically unpaid, make the 15 minutes paid time. Or offer the privilege of being able to start work 15 minutes later than the normal start time or leave 15 minutes early.



Reward employees with gift certificates or cards to area businesses, restaurants, movie theaters or even your garden center.



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7. Recognize temporary and seasonal employees with a framed certificate thanking them for their contributions. Never give the impression you think of them as simply paid help. As you know, temporary workers can be invaluable, especially for a smaller business. Don't take their loyalty for granted when you can do something basic to recognize their contributions.

8. Write a note of thanks on the back of your business card, and hand it to an unsuspecting employee in a gesture of appreciation.

9. Bestow the "Go Out on a Limb" award to employees that go the extra mile by proposing a new, creative or better way of doing something. That better way could be related to customer service, taking inventory, stocking, reducing losses of live merchandise or anything else that is a positive contribution to the business.

10. Recognize an employee's aptitude or skill by inviting him or her to teach or coach other employees. This is another simple idea that costs nothing but is a great way to reward and recognize an employee who has something to share. It's a win-win situation for everyone involved in the learning experience. Most employees will feel proud to be selected for this assignment even though they may not admit it.

11. One business designed a "Gotcha" award. All employees received a supply of \$1 gift certificates to local restaurants. They were asked to award them to deserving co-workers in recognition of good work over a time period of one month.

12. Consider an "R&R" fund. When your business has an exceptional

sales day, everyone wins. The owner puts \$5 (or whatever amount is deemed appropriate) into an R&R fund. Three or four times each year, the money is spent on a social event for all the employees. If the employees get to decide what that event will be, it's even better.

13. Keep top performers under constant review to make sure they are being rewarded and recognized. It's easy to take your superstars for granted, which is a huge mistake. Often, our outstanding employees feel they are being short changed in the area of recognition. They sometimes quit for that reason alone.

14. Raise the retail discount for employees by 10 percent.

15. Recognize and reward employees who work on non-scheduled days. These are the people you call on to work weekends, holidays and/or their day(s) off. We often take these people and their loyalty for granted.

16. Reward employees with movie passes (or something of equal value) on their birthdays.

17. If they miss a big sale or a deal falls apart, it doesn't make them a bad person or a failure. Expect and reward success, but accept human limitations and bad luck.

18. Be visible and not just when you need someone to do something. Get out of your comfort zone, walk around and talk to your employees. This is just as true for the frontline supervisor as it is for the business owner.

19. At the beginning of the day, put five (or more) coins in your pocket. During the day, each time you recognize an employee for an accomplishment, transfer a coin to your other pocket. Your goal is to transfer all of the coins from one pocket to the other by the end of the shift.

20. Select a performance goal you would like to recognize for the month, such as highest customer satisfaction rating. Employees vote

for the winner. The reward can be a special privilege or gift certificate.

21. Recognize your employees for their hard work with a classified ad in the local newspaper. Consider mentioning the names of each employee in the ad. Go one step

further and include a photo of your entire team along with a few words of thanks or congratulations. 🌿

Carol Hacker is a human resource consultant, seminar leader and author of 13 business books, including Hiring Top Performers — 350 Great Interview Questions for People Who

Need People. She can be reached at (770) 410-0517 or visit www.carolahacker.com for more information.

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