



HOW CAN I

*hands*

EVER

THANK YOU?

# Employee appreciation doesn't have to cost a lot, but can make a world of difference.

By Rhonda Kissane, CAPP

In tight budget times, the norm has become “do more with less.” Employees are absorbing a larger workload, and usually doing it with no additional compensation. If you, like many, have experienced budget cuts and still have a smooth-running operation, it's time to thank the people who help make it possible.

As a manager, it is important to recognize the fine job your employees are doing. A sincere “thank you” or verbal acknowledgement of employees will go a long way. People welcome a compliment or some sort of recognition when they perform a job of which they are proud. Even though they'll frequently tell you thanks aren't necessary, human nature means we all enjoy being recognized and thanked.

Depending on your organization's policies and your budget, you can express your appreciation in many ways. Companies that manufacture products are able to reward their employees by offering the product they produce to their employees: Anheuser-Busch employees in St. Louis, Mo., are entitled to two free cases of beer each month. Exxon employees receive a 10 percent discount on the price of gas and a 15 percent discount on tires, batteries, and accessories for their vehicles.

This can translate to parking departments of larger companies that provide services to their customers—those services can be offered as compensation for a job well done. Delta Airlines gives employees and their spouses unlimited annual travel passes anywhere the airline flies. FedEx employees can fly free on the company's planes or receive reduced rates on other airlines. Merle Norman Cosmetics in Los Angeles buys its female employees makeovers.

Some companies reward their employees in other ways. J.P. Morgan & Company in New York provides a free lunch to all of their 6,000 employees every day, while Ford Motor Company and AT&T feature employees in their commercials.

## Cultivating Joy

Other companies just want to keep their employees happy, so they create fun working environments. A few examples:

- To thank employees for their accomplishments, Dow Corning in Midland, Mich., hosts ice cream socials where the managers make sundaes for their employees.
- Wilson Learning Corporation in Minnesota gives each employee a Mickey Mouse watch after three months of employment as a reminder to always have fun while working. (At 10 years, workers receive gold Mickey watches.)
- Hewlett-Packard Company, Palo Alto, Calif., uses informal beer bursts in the afternoons to mark special events.
- Blanchard Training and Development in Escondido, Calif., has managers celebrate a Day of Excellence once a year, hosting interactive murder mysteries for fun. They also hire a hypnotist to entertain or bring in a masseuse to give shoulder and neck massages to their employees.
- Linda Miles & Associates, a seminar planning firm in Virginia Beach, Va., celebrates Happy Feet Day, when all employees are treated to pedicures.
- Southwest Airlines in Dallas hosts a Halloween costume contest, a Thanksgiving poem contest, and an annual chili cook-off.
- Advanta Corporation in Horsham, Pa., has senior managers dress up like chefs and cook hamburgers and hot dogs for their employees.
- The Walt Disney Company opens Disneyland one night

during the Christmas holidays just for their employees and their families. The concession stand and rides are run by senior managers dressed in costume.

- PlayFair in Berkeley, Calif., keeps the work environment fun by putting rubber fish in the water cooler, stapling Kleenex to potentially-stressful memos, gluing chocolate kisses to boring memos, having a casual dress days that include Hawaiian Day or Suspender Friday, or having a surprise picnic for their employees in the parking garage!

### Bringing it Home

As a manager, I know the importance of keeping good staff members in my employ. It is essential for a successful parking operation to retain productive, courteous employees who know their jobs, are dependable and trustworthy, and aren't afraid to go the extra mile. People want to go to jobs they enjoy, have fun while completing their duties, be fairly compensated, and receive acknowledgement when they do their job well.

All that is still true, but many of us have had reality checks in the budget department over the last few years. I work for a cash-strapped governmental agency, and my attempts to reward my employees cannot be lavish. Even though I work in a parking garage, I am forbidden to give away free parking, and had to come up with other options. Although some of the ideas I'm about to share seem corny, the message behind them is genuine.

First and foremost, it is important to personally congratulate the employee who is doing a wonderful job. It may not seem like a big deal, but this action shows that you are aware of what's happening in your organization and appreciate when your staff members do a great job. If this is done publicly, it will also boost the morale of the other employees by showing that you care enough about your staff to take the time to acknowledge and thank them. This action will cost nothing, but reap many rewards.

When there is a situation in the workplace that needs attention, why not ask your employees for their input? A manager might not see things that a person who performs the actual task sees. It is always a good idea to get another perspective on things. An employee may feel empowered knowing his superiors are interested in his opinion, and that his input may have been used in the solution to a problem.

To work within my limited budget, I contacted other departments in my organization to see if promotional merchandise such as coffee mugs, water bottles, pens, or tee shirts were left over from previous events. I asked if the other departments would be willing to donate a few items to mine. Because many items were generic with only the county logo printed on them, this idea worked well. Coffee mugs with specific causes or departmental names listed on them were still appreciated,

and I purchased bags of candy and filled the mugs with the sweet treats.

Occasionally, I buy pizza, hamburgers, tacos, submarine sandwiches, or a bucket of chicken for an in-office lunch for my staff. The parking operation always requires coverage in the attendant booths, so the entire staff cannot leave the premises at the same time to go out for a nice meal. Bringing lunch in allows for camaraderie and a small break from the daily routine. Depending on the number of staff members in your organization, this may be a relatively inexpensive show of appreciation.

Edible treats are always a winner. Sometimes, I purchase cases of soda and microwave popcorn for the break room, fill a candy dish in the parking office, provide doughnuts for a morning meeting, purchase bottled water, or bake cookies or cupcakes for staff members.

Small prizes are also fun. These can include lottery tickets, fast food restaurant gift cards, or tickets to a local movie theater. Discount warehouse stores such as Costco sell gift cards for movie tickets, ice cream cones, coffee drinks, fruit smoothies, candies, and other small treats for very reasonable prices.

Writing a letter to an employee acknowledging the great customer service provided or the action that went above and beyond can also be a terrific morale-booster. Be sure to forward a copy to your superiors and add a copy to the employee's personnel file. Your staff's actions are a reflection of you, so this benefits you and the employee!

If you are able, offer to take the employee and a co-worker of his or her choice to lunch with you. It is a nice opportunity to get to know your employees a little bit better.

Personalize it when you can. A sleeve of golf balls and tees for the golfer, tennis balls for the tennis player, a baseball or baseball cap for the baseball player, a water bottle for the runner, fishing hooks and lures for the fisherman, or a new CD for the dancer might bring a smile to his/her face for not much outlay. A few paints or brushes for the artist, seeds or gardening tools for the gardener, spices or oils for the cook, some stickers or papers for the scrapbooker, yarn or knitting needles for the knitter, cards or dice for the gamer, a book or magazine/newspaper subscription for the reader, and other trinkets that match their interests can also go a long way.

You might also offer to do your employee's least-favorite task for one day, or allow the employee to park in your reserved parking space for a week.

There are many other options that won't break the bank, including balloons, fresh flowers, a potted plant, a DVD, a bottle of wine, an extended lunch hour or extra break, or just an old-fashioned thank-you note. Remember it's the gesture of appreciation, not the cost of the reward, that counts. **P**



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