50 Ways to Show Appreciation

As you review the following list, note those items you have used and those you will use. If your have-used count is high, you'll want to keep it up. If it is low, that might be your cue to introduce a new recognition strategy.

1. Start a Wall of Fame. Keep it active for a year, adding framed pictures of employees or teams as they complete written goals.
2. Start every work unit meeting with praise for accomplishments and behaviors since your last meeting.
3. Arrange to have an article in the SLULife newsletter describing the accomplishments of an employee or your work unit.
4. Set a measurable work unit goal for a specified time period and celebrate when your unit achieves it. Go to lunch, have a pizza party, or bring in some sweet treats.
5. Keep a stash of thank you cards that you and all employees can use to write hand-written thank yous.
6. Recognition lunch, honoring people for meeting short-term (monthly, quarterly) goals.
7. Have a Thank-you meeting, at which everyone in work unit thanks everyone else for something specific. Hold these at regular intervals and remind people to keep track of small favors that they can mention when called on to speak.
8. Institute a Department Recognition Board. Post citations, thank-you letters, customer commendations, and notes about each other. Solicit new items as needed to keep the board full and the turnover frequent enough so the board remains interesting.
9. Organize "Values Lunch" (or breakfast or even dinner) to recognize specific behaviors by employees that support your organization's stated values. Enlist nominations from coworkers (requiring specific descriptions of behavior) in advance and recognize everyone nominated.
10. Create a point system, whereby employees can accumulate points in a variety of ways and use them for a choice of awards.
11. Celebrate birthdays and work anniversaries.
12. Produce a calendar every month that shows all the fun events happening: ie Halloween Party, birthday party, plus any lunch and learns or charity events. It also shows all weird and wonderful national celebration days - like National Bring your Teddy Bear to work day.
13. Do an employee's job for a day.
14. Morning coffee every day for a week hand-delivered by the manager.
15. Decorate an employee's office.
16. Increased authority. Empower the employee to take actions without your permission and (within boundaries) make monetary decisions.
17. Honor employee subgroups in your department with their own day or week. For example: Administrative Professional Week, Student Worker Day, Coordinator Week, etc.
18. Shadow Project. Arrange for employees to spend time observing and working on a project outside their own realm of expertise.
19. A day to work on a favorite task only. Arrange for coverage of the employee's other tasks so that the person doesn't return to a backlog the next day.
20. "How Can We Help?" Day. This is a way for a whole team or work unit to show esteem for an overburdened and under-recognized coworker. Each person offers to assume one task for the person being recognized.

21. Send an employee to a professional conference related to his area of accomplishment.

22. Solicit customer commendations for employees and display them prominently.

23. Establish and name an award after an employee. If you create a Jane Doe Award for exceptional customer service, you honor Jane Doe again each time you present it to someone else.

24. Bring in a massage therapist to do chair massages—especially for employees who sit hunched over machines or phones.

25. Track a host of measurements and celebrate them all: reduced absenteeism, reduced lateness, reduced sick days, days without on-the-job accidents.

26. "Catch Them Doing Something Right" video or DVD. Capture a year's worth of on-the-job highlights and play them at a recognition event or holiday party. Then keep it ready to play in the work unit all during the following year.

27. Cook lunch for your unit and bring it to the workplace.

28. Work unit yearbook or "annual report" featuring accomplishments of all employees. Desktop publishing makes it possible to do a professional-looking job inexpensively. Each employee gets one. Keep yours in a prominent place in your office.

29. Donation to the employee's favorite charity in the employee's name.

30. Let your employee leave early for the day.


32. Subscription to a professional magazine.

33. Identify professional conference for employee to attend.

34. Award a Puzzle Award for problem-solvers.

35. Present a framed cartoon related to the work done by the recipient. Keep your eyes open and build up a collection of clipped cartoons that you can use for this purpose. This kind of reward says you care and that you really understand the person's job.

36. Send an employee to a training course or seminar of her choice.

37. Small bulletin boards, designed to encourage people to "brag" a little by posting their commendations or thank-you notes. Put a note from you on each board as you present it.

38. Breakfast for another work unit hosted by your group. It could be bagels or a full buffet. Take it to a department that does a service for yours.

39. "This Is Your Life." Surprise an employee with a celebration recalling the highlights of the person's career. Bring in old friends, early managers, and executives.

40. Arrange for a team to present the results of its efforts to a group of upper-level management.

41. Create a photo collage of your employees at work display it in a high traffic area.

42. Recognize the importance of a new employee with a "Welcome!" sign and gathering.

43. Community service recognition event. Give a certificate or plaque to everyone who fulfills a commitment to community service.

44. Let the department wear jeans for a day.

45. Create a homemade funny trophy that is appropriate to what is being recognized.

46. Have employees nominate coworkers for employee of the month or year.
47. “Thank a Customer” party. Everyone invites a favorite customer (external or internal) and presents a citation to the guest. Inviting the guests to respond is a great way to solicit some positive feedback.
48. Swap a task. Reward a coworker with an offer to trade for a day (or week) a task of yours the person covets for one of his or hers the person dislikes.
49. Give your employee a standing ovation at a department meeting.
50. Greet employees in the morning, reinforcing the message, "I'm glad you're here."