

No and Low-Cost Ways to Recognize Employees

In tight financial times, ongoing, meaningful rewards and recognition provide an effective, low cost way of raising morale and encouraging higher levels of performance. Here are 100 ideas to help you embed employee recognition into your everyday work.

No Cost

- 1) Say “Thank you” and mean it.
- 2) Profile recognized employees in a newsletter.
- 3) Greet employees by name every morning.
- 4) Include “kudos” as an agenda item at a staff meeting.
- 5) Encourage staff to appreciate and respect each other.
- 6) Encourage and grant release time for employees to participate in professional development opportunities and in campus activities/committees.
- 7) Arrange for a team to present the results of its efforts to upper management.
- 8) Pick a recognizable symbol (e.g. stuffed animal, old trophy, toy) that can be displayed on an employee’s desk for a day/week so everyone in the department knows they are being recognized.
- 9) Answer someone else’s telephone for a day.
- 10) Encourage and recognize staff that pursues continuing education.
- 11) Post a thank you note on an employee’s door/cube/computer.
- 12) Acknowledge individual achievements by using employee’s names when preparing a status report
- 13) Make a thank-you card by hand.
- 14) Establish a place to display memos, posters, photos and so on, recognizing progress towards goals and thanking individual employees for their help.
- 15) Swap a task with an employee for a day – his/her choice.
- 16) Establish a “Behind the Scenes/Unsung Hero” award specifically for those whose actions are not usually in the limelight.
- 17) Nominate the employee for a University formal award program and give them a copy of the nomination form.
- 18) Keep in mind that managers should serve as coaches to indirectly influence rather than demand desired behavior.
- 19) Take time to explain to new employees the norms and culture of your department.
- 20) Give special assignments to people who show initiative.
- 21) Give out Felix and Oscar awards to people with the neatest and messiest desks.
- 22) Present “State of the Department” reports periodically to your employees acknowledging the work and contributions of individuals and teams.
- 23) At a monthly staff meeting, award an Employee of the Month and have everyone at the meeting stand up and say why that person is deserving of the award.
- 24) Recognize employees who actively serve the community.

- 25) If your team is under pressure, bring a bag of marbles or tootsie pops to work and take a break– sure stress relievers.
- 26) Have staff vote for top manager, supervisor, employee and rookie of the year.
- 27) Name a continuing recognition award after an outstanding employee (maybe a respected retired employee).
- 28) Include an employee in a “special”, high-level meeting.
- 29) Give a shiny new penny for a thought that has been shared.
- 30) Give employees an extra long lunch break.
- 31) Allow employees to attend meetings in your place when you are not available.
- 32) Create an Above and Beyond the Call of Duty (ABCD) Award.
- 33) Find ways to reward department-specific performance.
- 34) Ask your boss to attend a meeting with your employees during which you thank individuals and groups for their specific contributions.
- 35) Pop in at the first meeting of a special project team and express your appreciation for their involvement.
- 36) Start a suggestion program and acknowledge each suggestion.
- 37) Write a letter of praise recognizing specific contributions and accomplishments. Send a copy to senior management and the employee’s personnel file.
- 38) When you hear a positive remark about someone, repeat it to that person as soon as possible (face-to-face is best, e-mail or voice mail are good in a pinch).
- 39) Call an employee to your office to thank them (don’t discuss any other issue).
- 40) If you have a department newsletter, publish a “kudos” column and ask for nominations throughout the department.
- 41) Publicly recognize the positive impact on operations of the solutions employees devise for problems.
- 42) Acknowledge individual achievements by using employee names in status reports.
- 43) Tape a special departmental event and share copies with participants.
- 44) Express an interest in employee’s career development goals.
- 45) Post a large “celebration calendar” in your work area. Tack on notes of recognition to specific dates.
- 46) Pop in at the first meeting of a special project team and express your appreciation for their involvement.
- 47) Send a letter to all team members at the conclusion of a project, thanking them for their participation.
- 48) Practice positive nonverbal behaviors that demonstrate appreciation.
- 49) Support “flex-friendly” schedules.
- 50) Encourage employees to identify specific areas of interest in job-related skills. Then arrange for them to spend a day with an in-house “expert” to learn more about the topic.
- 51) Encourage employees to participate in community volunteer efforts.
- 52) Share verbal accolades – forward positive voice mail messages.
- 53) Actively listen to co-workers, especially when discussing their accomplishments and contributions.
- 54) Use 3x5 cards to write “You’re special because...” statements. People can collect the cards and refer to them when things aren’t going perfectly.

- 55) Keep a supply of appropriately funny notes that can be given as immediate rewards. Keep the supply visible – in a basket or box in your office.
- 56) Widely publicize suggestions used and their positive impact on your department.
- 57) When someone has spent long hours at work, send a letter of thanks to his/her home.
- 58) Allow an employee to choose his/her next assignment.
- 59) Recognize a team accomplishment by designating that team as consultants to other teams.
- 60) Recognize those committed to personal health and wellness (not just those that are fit, but those who are making an effort – members of a walking team, for instance).
- 61) Send birthday/get well/sympathy cards to employees' homes.
- 62) Have an outstanding employee spend a day with a dean or director.
- 63) Encourage and allow employee's to attend University events.
- 64) Smile. It's contagious.

Low Cost

- 65) Create and post an "Employee Honor Roll" in reception area.
- 66) Create a wall of fame wall with photos of outstanding employees.
- 67) Make a photo collage about a successful project that shows the people that worked on it, its stage of development and its completion and presentation.
- 68) Bring an employee bagged lunches/breakfast for a week.
- 69) Find out the person's hobby and buy an appropriate but inexpensive gift.
- 70) Make and deliver a fruit basket.
- 71) Cover the person's desk with balloons.
- 72) Design a "Stress Support Kit" that included aspirin, a comedy CD, wind up toys and a stress ball – or design your own.
- 73) Set up a miniature golf course in your office, using whatever materials you have on hand. Set aside an afternoon or evening to hold a mini golf tournament. Have each area design their own "hole" and give a prize.
- 74) Wear color-coded name tags in a staff meeting to indicate significant achievements – such as length of service, successful project completion, etc.
- 75) Give Mr. Goodbar (candy bar) Awards
- 76) Give an employee a blue ribbon for achievement.
- 77) Give a deserving employee a mug filled with treats.
- 78) Give a framed poem (poster or card) as a thank you.
- 79) Acknowledge and celebrate birthdays.
- 80) Give a note reading, "Thank you. You are a _____!" Attach a roll of Lifesavers.
- 81) Make a necklace of lifesavers and give it to someone "For being the "lifesaver of _____."
- 82) Give a puzzle as an award to a problem solver.
- 83) Treat an employee to lunch.
- 84) Give out (fake) gold coins/stars for a job well done.
- 85) Bake a gift (cookies, bread, etc.) for an outstanding employee or team.

Would Require Some Funding

- 86) Plan a surprise picnic/luncheon/breakfast.
- 87) Give the person a copy of the latest best-selling management or business book or a subscription to a trade magazine.
- 88) Give someone something from the UB Bookstore for their desk.
- 89) Serve ice cream sundaes to all of your employees at the end of a project.
- 90) Once a year, have a "Staff Appreciation Day" where the managers supply, cook and serve food.
- 91) Serve a team a hero party sandwich at the end of an assignment, for a job well done.
- 92) Send flowers or note to an employee's home as a thank you.
- 93) Purchase a unique pin to serve as a memento for a task well done.
- 94) Provide a lunch for project teams once they have made interim findings to express your appreciation.
- 95) Hold informal retreats to foster communication and set goals.
- 96) Start an employee recognition program. Give points for attendance, punctuality, teamwork, etc. Provide prizes for employees who reach certain point goals.
- 97) Give a personalized coffee cup.
- 98) Design and give magnets with appropriate messages.
- 99) Create and string a banner across the work area.
- 100) Plan a surprise achievement celebration for an employee or group of employees.
- 101) Serve popcorn and lemonade on Friday (especially after a particularly hard week).
- 102) At an employee meeting, randomly tape gift certificates to the bottom of chairs (for the first time, choose chairs only in the front row).
- 103) Have a recognition event created by a peer group that decides what they will give and why they will give it.
- 104) Throw a pizza lunch party for your unit.
- 105) Have weekly breakfasts with groups of employees.
- 106) Give an employee tickets to a UB athletic or cultural event.

Online Resources

Here are some websites that you can use if you plan to order items to support your recognition program:

www.positivepromtions.com

www.proforma.com

www.thecollegestore.com/buffalo