

Employee Recognition Ideas

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21 Fun Employee Appreciation Ideas for Small Businesses

Editor's note: It's been a tough year for all of us. For business owners, it's been incredibly challenging. All of our employees have done incredible work staying safe, taking care of their families and doing great work for our companies and organizations. Here are some ways to recognize them now and always.

Engaged employees are more productive and likely to share good things about your workplace. They are, in a way, the best kind of brand ambassador. But how do you improve employee engagement? One way is to recognize them with employee appreciation awards, though not every idea will work for every employee.

Use our list of best practices as a jumping-off point for your own ideas, and incorporate what makes your workplace special into both the planning and execution stages.

Best staff appreciation ideas

How do you currently show your employees that they matter? You may already do some type of appreciation program. If you haven't revamped it in years, however, it may be time to take another look. Here are some of the perks other companies are using to show their appreciation for their workers.

1. Throw a party



For some employees, there are never enough reasons to celebrate. But why not give them just one more? Employee appreciation party ideas include decade-themed parties and gatherings based on pop culture trends. Be aware of intellectual property rules and cultural misappropriation, though, because they can mar the good intentions behind such events.

Working remotely? Consider a virtual get-together. Give each employee a small budget to decorate their

workspace with a custom background and décor for a Zoom-hosted soiree. Encourage employees to chat, sing, and play games while showing off their spaces.

2. Offer food

Everyone loves to eat. From monthly catered meals to an ample supply of healthy snacks in the breakroom, food sends the right message. Whether you offer it regularly (like every Friday) or dish it out sparingly, be sure to communicate your plans so people know when to expect a meal. No one wants to schedule an off-site meeting just to learn there will be free food for those who stick around.

Arrange for fresh fruit boxes, tasting samples, or custom snack swag to be delivered directly to your remote employee's doors. They'll also appreciate gift cards for food delivery services like Uber Eats or Postmates.

3. Give verbal praise



People like to hear that they've done a good job. Don't miss an opportunity to speak their worth in public. Make sure your words of affirmation are personal and specific to each person.

4. Add a vacation or sick day

Everyone can use a little more time to take care of loved ones or simply give themselves some TLC. With the pandemic stretching childcare duties to the maximum, letting everyone have just one more day off may come as a lifesaver for many. Be sure to encourage your employees to actually use these days, though.

5. Give out gift cards

Gift cards are a great token of thanks. Be sure to provide cards to places where your team members actually shop. Also, be mindful of the gift card's value, because the last thing you want to do is force employees to pay out of pocket for items they may have never purchased otherwise. Consider local coffee shops, grocery stores, and preferred restaurants (if you're aware of them, of course).

6. Pick an employee of the month



This traditional award still has merit, as long as you pair it with a tangible reward. The reward could even be the gift card or food items we mentioned above, or something truly unique to the moment. Do your best to recognize employees at every level of the company so that it feels accessible to everyone. Decide on a fair method of choosing in advance, even if it's based on management recommendations.

7. Take them to lunch

We've already established that food is a favorite reward, and offering an employee one-on-one time with a manager or boss makes it even more special. Let the employee pick the place from a pre-selected list of preferred eateries. If it makes more sense to order in and eat in the conference room, then do that.

You can still have a very special lunch with remote workers. Send them a food or grocery gift card and set up a video chat for a time that works well for them. This is a great way to recognize their work, especially during the

pandemic.

8. Provide entertainment

Live, in-office concerts bring a nice change of pace, as long as it is purely for fun. Choose from magicians, music, comedians, or artists. Whatever you pick, avoid making it a “learning” opportunity. This is especially important for remote arrangements, where people are already tired of attending virtual meetings.

9. Subscription services as gifts

From streaming music stations to a coffee-of-the-month club, these are a fun way to give ongoing gifts to your best performers. Try to budget for at least three months of service, so that employees really have something to look forward to. If you are unsure how to handle food preferences, give your employee a choice of offerings.

10. Upgrade the breakroom



Swap sterile furniture for something with personality (and comfort) or add a gaming table or other relaxing element. This helps make the breakroom a place for actual breaks. If you’re dealing with 100% remote teams, find a way to help with their costs for comforts at home like [an ergonomic desk chair](#) or [an upgraded monitor](#).

11. Provide some swag

Skip the beer koozies, cheap stress balls, and mousepads. Give them swag gifts they’ll want to use, such as quality clothing, hand sanitizer, tech-charging accessories, coffee, candles, or water bottles. Instead of paying to mail gear to remote teams, consider offering credit to a custom printing site they can order from directly.

12. Share the love on social

A tweet or Instagram story that says how much you appreciate a worker can go a long way. The best part about sharing on your [business social media accounts](#) is that it’s free for you to do. This is also an equitable way to show your appreciation to both in-house and remote employees.

13. Remember birthdays and work anniversaries

These are still relevant and can provide a much-needed touchpoint for your employee. For even more excitement, you could mimic the traditional anniversary themes with wood, silver, or gold gift tiers. As employees stay on longer, they should get increasingly valuable gifts.

14. Send a thank-you note

Email is nice, but handwritten praise is always better. From sticky notes to traditional greeting cards, employees will remember these for years to come. They’re ideal for both remote and in-house teams.

15. Feature them on your website

If your team is small enough, include them all in the “team” tab. If not, consider a rotation of talent. You can feature five employees per month, for example, as they work together on a project.

16. Ask them to contribute content

Guest posts by team members are an excellent way to let them express themselves and show off their talent. Give them a few topics to write about, or let them share their favorite work experience. Be sure to promote it well across your social channels.

17. Help them develop

Career and personal growth are important to almost every employee. Provide reimbursement for a set amount of training or professional education each year, as well as some for personal enrichment pursuits, like learning another language. There are many free resources like [HP Life](#), too, so providing paid time for classes to your employee would be your only cost. Also, consider subscriptions to ebook or audiobook services.

18. Mentor



Even if you don't have a formal mentoring program, seek out ways to connect employees with those who can help advocate for them in the workplace. You can do this within departments or choose to open it up to all channels of your company. In fact, the latter may offer the most learning opportunities with cross-departmental collaboration as an added bonus.

19. Reimburse for travel

From parking to bus fare, even small expenses add up. Consider pitching in for even one expense category for all employees. You could offer reimbursed parking fees or bus fares, for example, with a cap at a certain amount each month.

20. Celebrate personal wins

From new babies to finishing a 5K, keeping tabs on your workers' individual achievements outside of work can help them feel relevant and improve the company culture. This does require them to let you in on their lives, so make it easy for them to submit their accomplishments through a work chat or comment form.

21. Volunteer

Empowering employees through service opportunities has big rewards for you and them. It's proven to [promote employee engagement](#), which is one of the reasons to consider these employee recognition ideas in the first place.

Consider designing a company-sponsored volunteer program that both recognizes employees and gives them an opportunity to help others. Whether you encourage pro-bono hours for your services or partner with a non-profit, the results may be just what you're looking for.

Tips for picking the right team appreciation ideas

Not every idea will work for every employee group. For example, some smaller teams may not be a good fit for ideas better suited to a larger group. Aim to please the majority, but don't be afraid to seek out unique ways to reward individuals, especially if they have been with your company for a long time and are a vital part of the corporate family.

Asking each employee what they value and how they would personally like to be rewarded may be the best way to speak their language. You can easily do this during annual performance reviews or other scheduled one-on-one conversations.

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