

Employee-appreciation ideas

Question: "I need some good employee-appreciation ideas. My company has about 500 employees who work in different departments, and we don't even recognize birthdays! There's so much to be done, but I wanted to get some other points of view first." -- *Looking for ideas in Mississippi*

Editor's Note: Looking for more advice on low-cost employee incentives, meaningful employee recognition programs, and inspiring employee awards? — Get our **FREE** special report, [**12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program**](#), now!

Comments

Hi,

I just wanted to address the person's question about employee appreciation ideas. My boss gives \$5.00 Starbucks cards for their birthday. Our employees love it! :)
Barb

Posted by: Barb Woytek | February 24, 2006 at 04:20 PM

We have an Employee Recognition luncheon catered each year and awards are given out for years of service by 5 years and up. We also have quarterly all-staff meetings (about 120 people) and "Proud to Serve" awards are given to certain individuals for their individual initiative that quarter. This is a plaque as well as a monetary gift. Different departments differ as to whether birthdays are celebrated or not. Our department used to have cake and a card but we stopped doing it. Each year at Christmas time each employee is given a gift also, usually something useful with the company logo on it. I hope your company decides to do something, it really helps morale.

Posted by: Irene Bush | February 24, 2006 at 04:30 PM

We are allowed to spend \$12 per person on Employee Appreciation throughout the year. We can use it anyway we want so for our Dept., we have an ice cream sundae social during the summer and do a Holiday Potluck during the winter.

Posted by: Lori | February 24, 2006 at 04:31 PM

At the last company where I worked, we had over 500 employees. Each department had their own birthday celebrations. The company as a whole, however, had Employee of the Month. They were nominated by co-

workers and it was interesting to see who was going to be next. We had a big cake and snacks and drinks! We also had annual recognition for years of service. Our company also had an annual Employee appreciation day where we had a catered meal. One year was a luau theme. It was fun.

Posted by: Debra | February 24, 2006 at 04:37 PM

A great place to start would be with a years of service recognition program. We recognize each anniversary in 5-year increments. Rather than celebrating individual birthdays, you could have one or several large sheet cake(s) one day a month in honor of all the birthdays that month. You don't even need to list the names of the birthday folks, some people prefer to keep that information private.

Posted by: Ann | February 24, 2006 at 04:41 PM

Because we have so many employees it's impossible to to keep up with all the birthday, so here's what we do for our employees: The first Thursday of each month we have bagels or donuts etc. for the people who have birthdays in that month, each supervisor is responsible for a turn picking up the goodies. We use to have 1/2 day birthday off with pay, but that change when our company was purchased by a larger corporation. Each year we have an employee appreciation day, 1/2 day (paid) at the park with food and games, if you don't come you still get the 1/2 day off with pay. Perfect attendance various monthly goodies, movie tickets, gift certificates, etc.

I hope this is helpful!

Posted by: Margarette | February 24, 2006 at 04:45 PM

Similar to the Starbucks idea, we give a birthday card (generic \$1.99) + \$5 Blockbuster card + a packet of microwave popcorn. This is wrapped in a bundle with ribbon or raffia around it. They love this a lot more than the monthly birthday cake we did before.

Posted by: Julie | February 24, 2006 at 04:47 PM

I work for a state government agency so we are limited in what we can do as far as providing meals, etc. Our division consists of about 230 full- and part-time positions. Since I am the division's HR liaison, I have access to birth-date information so I keep a current birthday list. I create a birthday greeting that we email from our division director and his office staff to each employee on his/her birthday.

I have also prepared postcard greetings that I send out to new hires and to current staff who achieve promotions.

I ask our mid-level managers to keep me apprised of significant events or accomplishments in the lives of our employees such as births, marriages, graduations, deaths in family, etc. I have postcards that I use for births, marriages or graduations. Thus far I am just using purchased greeting cards for condolences.

If you would like to see some of my ideas for greetings, send me an email request.

Posted by: Kathy | February 24, 2006 at 04:52 PM

We put out a quarterly newsletter and as part of that newsletter we have a years of service recognition list, recognizing 1-year anniversaries and then in 5-year increments. We also do a quarterly employee recognition program...nominations are accepted throughout the quarter and then two employees are chosen to be highlighted in the newsletter. Those recognized employees are given company "money" to be used in the company store to purchase logo merchandise.

Posted by: Monica | February 24, 2006 at 04:58 PM

The company I currently work for is great in terms of employee recognition! Personally, my department has about 15 people and we do a birthday basket where each person (they don't have to) buys a minimal present--frame, candy, candle--that type of thing, on each person's birthday we do that. The company as a whole has a recognition banquet each year. There's always a different theme and we all say it's like the Grammy's or the Oscar's. They actually hold voting days about a month prior to the event and all the employees can vote on basically who they think is the best in each department. That person then wins a good sum of money. I first thought it was unfair, but your co-workers vote on it and it's fun. The whole week though before the awards ceremony is fun with picture taking and food brought in. This year everyone in the company got a \$20 gift card to Walmart. So that was nice, especially if you don't win the main prize. Other than those main things, our manager does a lot of things for us personally. We're currently doing a QA project--prizes for accuracy. So, there's some suggestions. But I think mainly if you are the main manager, you should encourage each department manager to do something for their group of employees.

Posted by: | February 24, 2006 at 05:00 PM

The company I work for (1500 employees) has an "Applause" program. We have Applause cards printed up that anyone can give to anyone else (with a handwritten note) for a job well done, a special thank you for going the extra mile, or anything that deserves special recognition. The "card" can also be sent electronically through e-mail. These cards are turned in by the recipient to a designated "drawing" box. Once a month we draw cards randomly (each department has a separate drawing box and one card per 25 employees per department is drawn). Small departments would have one winner, while larger ones may have several. The "winners" then receive a "Premiere Choice" award (see www.premierechoiceaward.com). This award is redeemed on line or by mail for gift cards to participating stores (retail and on-line) or can be donated to various charities. The awards can go unredeemed for up to 24 months (last I knew), so the recipient can "save them up" before redeeming. Note: there may be tax considerations to check on.

In addition to this Applause program, we also use the Premiere Choice awards for amounts from \$25 up to \$300 for more significant contributions by an employee (special projects, above and beyond, etc.). These are submitted by leadership. Again, there are income tax considerations.

As for birthday cards: my boss is a director with two managers and six supervisors reporting up through her. Each month I prepare birthday cards (for the following month) for each employee. My boss and I sign them then route them on to the managers and sups, with the cards eventually ending up with the appropriate supervisor. The other director in our division does something similar. In addition, our VP also delivers a birthday card to each employee. My boss has about 100 employees in her division, and there are about 230 total in our building. I purchase the cards from www.baudville.com, which specializes in employee appreciation-type products. (They also have excellent customer service.)

Sounds like you are getting a lot of good responses. Good luck! And kudos for recognizing the importance of employee appreciation! :) :)

Posted by: karen | February 24, 2006 at 05:16 PM

I work for a government municipality. Once a year we have an Employee Recognition dinner with the City Council and Department Directors serving the meal. A theme is chosen and appropriate entertainment is provided. Employees are recognized in 5 year periods. Up to 20 years the employees are asked to stand and be recognized. 20 years and beyond are escorted to the stage and introduced by their Department Director. A recognition gift is given according to the years of service. The cost of the ticket is usually \$10/person with those being recognized and their guest being paid for. At the end of the evening a DJ is available for dancing. Our particular department goes out to lunch to celebrate birthdays.

Posted by: Courtney L | February 24, 2006 at 05:19 PM

Our company also has an annual employee appreciation luncheon with awards for over five-years of service, 10 years, 15, etc. However, we have fewer employees. If you have an annual holiday party, you may want to combine them, or substitute a summer employee event with a luncheon or dinner.

Posted by: Lynn | February 24, 2006 at 05:21 PM

At our company (150+ employees) we give \$4 Baskin Robbins dollars for Birthdays, \$10 Blockbuster gift card quarterly for having no "injuries" for that quarter, anniversary flowers on your anniversary (a basket for 5+years), monthly birthday cake for all employees celebrating the birthdays for the month, catered Christmas breakfast for all employees, rewards 5, 10, 20, & 30 years anniversaries @ each holiday party, money for perfect attendance for the year (don't know how much, I think \$100), an annual "tenant appreciation luncheon" for all tenants of our building, bagels for everyone every 15th of the month, \$25 gift card for Thanksgiving, and movie tickets for employees that get 90% or higher on the mystery shops. This is a wonderful company to work at, they take care of us here. HAVE FUN IMPLEMENTING SOMETHING NICE!

Posted by: Sandy | February 24, 2006 at 06:43 PM

Get the book 24 Carrot Manager and Managing with Carrots by Chester Elton, Adrian Gostick
There is also a book 1001 Ways to Reward Your Employees, by Bob Nelson. Both are excellent resources.

Posted by: Lizz Chambers | February 26, 2006 at 11:26 AM

I want to know where Sandy works.. and if they're hiring! :-)

Posted by: Annie M. | February 26, 2006 at 11:29 AM

We celebrated everyone birthdays every last Thursday of every month at the cafeteria. We have our HR office send out a birthday card sign by our VP & GM. Other suggestions can be offering a half day off paid or a

complete day off paid, or adding 8 additional hours to their pay check as a compensation (this depending on company budget and time management).

Posted by: Patricia García | February 27, 2006 at 07:16 AM

There is a wonderful book "301 ways to have fun at work " by Dave Hesmsath and Leslie Yerkes. I work in a very small State Authority in Mass. and this book makes a world of difference, buy it you'll see you can have FUN at work and still get the job done on time and, (as we say in this office) under budget. Enjoy.

Posted by: Sandar Pike | February 27, 2006 at 09:06 AM

Each month I give our Manager birthday cards for all employees with birthdays that month. The manager personally writes a greeting and signs the card. The card is then mailed to the employees home about one week prior to their birthday. I also make a monthly calendar. I include all birthdays as well as service anniversaries.

We also have an anniversary award program where employees get a gift for every 5 years of service. We use an outside company (O.C. Tanner) to handle our service recognition program. The 5 year awards are delivered to the employee during department meetings. A picture is taken of the employee receiving his/her award from the Manager. The picture and announcement is then put in the next quarterly newsletter that I produce.

We also have an attendance program that our employees really like a lot. At the beginning of the year we give out gift cards to those employees who maintained good attendance for the previous year to a store of the employees choice (we usually give them options of 6 - 8 stores). We give the highest dollar amount to perfect attenders, a smaller amount to employees with one absence and a very small amount to people with two absences. Nothing is given to anyone with more than two absences.

Well, you've gotten lots of ideas from lots of people so I hope something will work for you.

Posted by: Michele | February 27, 2006 at 09:50 AM

I work for a company with over 36,000 employees so each department is responsible for employee recognition. I've worked in a few different departments and we've done cakes once a month, a bagel breakfast just as a thank you, as a whole the company does recognize your 5-year anniversary with a plaque. In my department of about 40 people, we have monthly department meetings, people are encouraged to email me or the manager hosting the meeting that month, any personal or professional milestones. This is mentioned during the meetings which keeps everyone up to date with what's going on in the department. This is a good idea if money is a problem. Also, we have implemented employee of the month, that person gets prime parking, big issue here, a card, and a lunch certificate.

Posted by: Tee | February 27, 2006 at 11:40 AM

My company is alot like the other Sandy who responded. In addition, our company name starts with "P" so we have a P.E.A.R. program (P__ Employee Award/Recognition Program). Anyone in the company can award any employee a P.E.A.R. pin for any action "above & beyond." Nomination slips are in the cafeteria with your name, the name of the person you nominate and why you are nominating them. The P.E.A.R. committee presents them with a pin in the shape of a pear (pins in various shapes can be

purchased at www.baudville.com) and their names are entered into a monthly drawing. The P.E.A.R. committee chooses one employee per month who made a significant contribution to the company and they receive either a \$25 gift certificate to Walmart or Home Depot or a paid half day off. They then draw one name for every 25 names submitted that month and those people currently receive a \$10 gas card. People here proudly wear their pins on their security lanyards or line them up in their office so there is a visual record of their "ataboys" and it encourages people to assist each other's departments rather than adopt a "not my job" attitude. All monetary gifts are recorded and reported to the IRS.

Posted by: Sandy | February 27, 2006 at 12:12 PM

We have a Sunshine Fund at work and we pay \$15.00 a year each and everyone volunteers to take turns for a month, and we send out birthday cards with a large pack of M&M's with the card (M&M's are purchased from Sam's Club - large box and we also have a list of things we send flowers or gift cards in time of illness - if you need further details, please feel free to call and we can send you our Sunshine Fund guidelines listing. Donna Clooke 585-352-2440 BOCES 2 Monroe-Orleans

Posted by: | February 27, 2006 at 12:53 PM

If you have any new or even existing restaurants in your area (who would love to impress a company with 500+ employees) see if they will give you a coupon for free lunch/ dinner or discount coupon once a month.

Posted by: Debra Urban | March 02, 2006 at 02:32 PM

We usually just celebrate birthdays by having cake and giving a card. Then we try to all go to lunch together.

Posted by: Bev | March 03, 2006 at 02:14 PM