



Giving Thanks: How to Show Employees They're #1 Without Breaking the Bank

This is the month of Thanksgiving, and every good HR professional knows that it's important to give thanks and show your employees that you appreciate them. High employee morale has positive effects on productivity and retention and just generally makes your office a better place to work. Year end is usually a time when employers begin to consider and distribute holiday bonuses and prepare for employee appreciation parties. Other means of communicating thanks have traditionally included benefits, stock options, and 401(k) profit-sharing matches. But what can you do if the economic crisis has cut into your budget, and those sorts of things just aren't an option? This white paper will explore inexpensive and free ways your company can show employees they are appreciated and help you build an inclusive culture where you don't necessarily have to spend big bucks to make employees feel welcome.

Employee Relations Programs: Supervisors Make the Difference

All too often, supervisors don't realize the impact they have on employee morale and just how important their role is in a positive employee relations program. But it's true – employees who have no confidence in their supervisors and feel they have no voice in the workplace are far more likely to listen to union sales talk and sign union cards. They're also far more prone to be unproductive and file lawsuits when things don't go their way in the workplace.

A recent survey hammers the point home. Seven hundred thirty supervisors in 24 large companies were

asked to rank 10 workplace morale factors in the order they thought their employees would rank them. As you might expect, most of the supervisors believed good wages and job security were the most important factors in determining employee morale. Here's what they said:

1. good wages;
2. job security;
3. promotion or advancement in the company;
4. good working conditions;
5. interesting work;
6. personal loyalty of company to employees;
7. tactful discipline;
8. full appreciation for work performed;
9. sympathetic help on personal problems; and
10. feeling "in" on things (letting them know, to the extent that you can, what is going on with the business, how the company is doing, and any changes that might be coming).

In the same survey, 34,000 employees in the same 24 companies were asked to rank the same 10 factors in order of importance to them. Here's what the employees said:

1. full appreciation for work performed;
2. feeling "in" on things;
3. sympathetic help on personal problems;
4. job security;
5. good wages;
6. interesting work;
7. promotion or advancement in the company;

8. personal loyalty of company to employees;
9. good working conditions; and
10. tactful discipline.

Interestingly, the supervisors' ranking of the top 10 workplace morale factors is almost upside down from their employees' ranking of the same factors. It's a mistake to believe economic issues like wages and benefits are the primary motivators of high employee morale. What do the first four issues on the employees' list have in common? Communication. And these are issues totally within the control of frontline supervisors. Employees want recognition for a job well done; they want to feel they have a stake in what's going on; they want someone to talk to who will listen and be sympathetic to their concerns; and they want the kind of job security that comes from their supervisors treating them on an even keel day in and day out.

Good Supervisors Are Essential

So what does it take to be a good supervisor? What are the characteristics? To find out, have your supervisors answer the following questions:

1. Do you know your job?
2. Do your employees have confidence in your ability to do your job?
3. Do you know your employees' jobs?
4. Are you able to provide instruction and guidance, and do you do so in a positive way?
5. Are you a good leader?
6. Do you enjoy your employees' respect? And how do you gain your employees' respect? By being firm but fair, honest, impartial, and consistent. Do you exhibit these characteristics?
7. Do you respect your employees both for the work they do and as individual human beings?
8. Do you listen to your employees?
9. Do you spend time with them?
10. Are you accessible?
11. Do you encourage your employees to express their ideas and speak out even if you may disagree?

12. Do you communicate clearly with your employees?
13. Do you give credit where credit is due?

Supervisors who answered yes to all or most of those questions are doing a great job. But they probably didn't or can't answer yes to all of these questions:

1. Do you argue with your employees?
2. Do you speak harshly when a more positive tone will do?
3. Do you curse your employees?
4. Do you exhibit a superior attitude?
5. Do you give your employees the brushoff?
6. Do you play favorites?
7. Do you take credit for your employees' ideas, suggestions, and good work?
8. Do you retaliate when employees disagree with you?

Tips for Being a Better Supervisor

Supervisors who answered yes to all, most, or any of these questions, need to make some changes. Here are some suggestions to give supervisors:

- **Get to Know Your Employees.** Find out their interests and what motivates them. Show an interest in and ask about their families, especially their kids. Think about it: The people you tend to appreciate the most are the ones who ask you about your children, their ball games, how they're doing in school, and the like. Your employees aren't any different.
- **Keep Employees Informed About What's Going On in the Company.** This doesn't mean you should reveal confidential company information. But don't surprise your employees by holding back information when there's no reason to do so. For example, if you know a turnaround or a big overtime project is coming up, let your employees know about it in plenty of time so they can plan ahead. They may need to make adjustments at home – for example, who will drop the kids off at school in the morning and pick them up in the evening – and they'll appreciate you more if you give them plenty of time to make the necessary adjustments.
- **Encourage Teamwork.** Stress the importance of the team goal rather than individual achievement. You don't necessarily want your employees competing with each



other – you want them bonding together against your company's competitors. If you can convince your employees to work together in harmony, you will have created a workplace that far exceeds the sum of its individual parts.

- **If There's a Problem, Don't Let It Stew.** Don't be afraid to weed out a marginal employee or take disciplinary action when appropriate, but be consistent and fair. Your employees won't respect you and they'll lose confidence in you as their supervisor if you allow a marginal employee to continue sloughing off so your good employees always have to take up the slack.
- **Always Emphasize the Positive When Talking with Employees About Company Policies.** Consider the following: Your company comes out with a new policy. One supervisor says to his employees, "I don't know what the bosses were thinking about when they came out with this policy. I don't see how it can possibly work. But they're the bosses, so we have to do what we're told." But another supervisor tells his employees, "A lot of people have put a lot of work and thought into this new policy to try to make things better around here. And I want all of you to work with me to do everything we can to make this new policy work. If you've got any ideas on how to improve the policy or make it work better, I want you to tell me about it, and I'll be sure to pass your ideas up the line." Which of these approaches do you think will increase the likelihood that the company's new policy will be a success? Remember, supervisors are leaders, and employees will follow their lead. If you're negative, your employees will be negative and unproductive and will cause problems for you and the company. If you're positive, your employees will be positive, more productive, and more satisfied in their work.

One of the first lines of defense against poor employee morale is your frontline supervisors. Consider printing off the following list and giving it to your employees who manage and supervise others.

15 Keys to Being a Good Supervisor

1. Know your employees as individuals.
2. Be approachable and a good listener.
3. Be responsive to questions and concerns.
4. Always follow up with your employees.
5. Apply policies and practices consistently.
6. Keep your employees informed about the business.
7. Communicate employee concerns up the line.
8. Recognize employee efforts.
9. Train your employees in all aspects of their jobs.
10. Seek ideas on how to do things better.
11. Develop your own technical job skills.
12. Expect, believe in, and encourage good work.
13. Constructively counsel your employees.
14. Use your authority with reason and restraint.
15. Admit your mistakes and correct them.

Inspire Camaraderie

The workplace isn't meant to be a play zone, but workers who feel a sense of camaraderie tend to be more effective and satisfied. Try to promote that sense of camaraderie through occasional company-sponsored events. Here are some ideas that will be free or relatively cheap for you while encouraging your employees to have fun together and build relationships within your company:

- Have potluck lunches with a theme.
- Have a game day where employees come dressed in sports team gear. Have employees bring in hot dogs and hamburgers and pasta salad. Maybe you could afford to buy a small grill or someone could volunteer to bring one.
- Encourage management to straighten up their areas and offer to help each individual "get organized." Work together to get things filed and organized.
- Put up a brag board. Employees can pin up pictures of their kids, pets, new homes, or cars or announce events like musical performances or plays they'll appear in. This will allow your employees to share the things that are important to them, generate conversation, and help create a sense of community.
- Get local retailers and businesses to give your employees discounts on their services or items.
- Have small contests, and give employees a free paid day off. Contests don't have to be work-related – you could do a "Guess Who" picture contest where people bring in baby pictures and you have to guess who's who. If you

can't offer a paid day off, that's OK. The prize doesn't have to be significant – you can buy a small trophy for under \$10 at a local trophy or sporting goods store.

- Set up a trivia board in the break room on which employees during their free time can write trivia questions for others to answer as they walk by. Everyone has a chance to test his or her knowledge of trivia.
- Hold a "Who can dress in the most colors?" day.
- Develop a "fun calendar." Schedule fun events on a regular basis, and get your employees to carry them out. Or better yet, let your employees decide what events belong on the "fun calendar."
- Select (or ask your employees to select) and promote a theme for the year. Build store events, perks, and awards around the theme.
- Have a cookie (or cake, or dessert, or any other dish) contest. Tell entrants to bring enough for everyone (if possible, or if you are a larger operation, encourage entrants to at least make a double batch) and make "secret ballots" on which your other employees can vote for categories such as "Best Traditional Cookie," "Most Unique Cookie," and "Best Chocolate Cookie." Have small kitchen-related awards for the winners (a set of measuring cups, a cookie cookbook, or a kitchen apron).

Show Your Appreciation of a Job Well Done

Cash may be king, but – as the survey ranking the top 10 morale factors revealed – a "Thank You" and some public recognition goes a long way towards showing employees that you appreciate their hard work and efforts on your behalf. When employees do a good job, reward them with praise and appreciation. Let them know that their efforts haven't gone unnoticed. When they step up to the plate and provide leadership, encourage their efforts. Praise costs nothing, but it can offer significant rewards.

In addition to offering praise, here are some ideas for showing employees you appreciate their efforts:

- When you reach a goal, have company executives make breakfast for the employees.

- Allow employees to take flex time. This shows both trust and appreciation.
- When you are meeting your goals, allow employees to take a half-day on the company on the first or last Friday of the month or leave early every once in a while.
- Have your executive team scrub and buff the employee of the month's car.
- Build a "Wall of Fame" and decorate it with pictures of team members, thank-you notes from clients, and news clippings about the company.
- Spotlight employees who are doing well in your company newsletter. Allow individuals and departments to submit "kudos" praising others to the newsletter.
- Send your employees "Thank You" letters to their homes when they have done something exceptional.
- During particularly stressful times, hire a masseuse for a few hours to give employees chair, hand, and neck massages.
- Give employees their birthdays off with pay.

Consider Alternative Benefits

Oftentimes, employees are just waiting for you to ask them what they want. Employees who feel that their ideas are valued develop more loyalty and satisfaction. Encourage them to make suggestions about how to build a better mousetrap or boost morale. An old-fashioned suggestion box in your break room or other common area is a great way to show employees you care about their ideas. Showing a willingness to listen can go a long way toward increasing employee satisfaction. While you don't have to adopt every idea that employees submit, you should be ready to take action on the feasible options or employees will see quickly that you aren't serious about their input, which will only drive morale down.

One of the biggest benefits a company can offer employees to increase morale is working to ensure they like their jobs and the employer they work for. Some simple, not-too-expensive ways to do that include the following:

- **Career Management.** Work with your employees to make sure the jobs they're working in best fit their skills and interests. A transfer within the organization can rejuvenate a long-term employee, and you get the payoff of an engaged workforce.



- **Succession Planning.** Let employees know what their advancement possibilities are within your organization. Many consider the sense of security that comes with knowing that their hard work will be rewarded a great benefit.
- **Giving Back.** Allow your employees to volunteer for worthy causes on the company clock (an hour a month will do). They'll come back to your workplace renewed and ready to work to contribute to an employer that allows them to give back to their community.

Bottom Line

Employee morale makes all the difference in the office environment. Times are hard enough these days without having to show up five days a week to a workplace filled with disgruntled coworkers and bosses who don't seem to care. Show employees that you appreciate everything they do, and you'll reap the benefits.

For more insight, tune in to the audio conference "Going Beyond the Paycheck: Low-Cost Recognition Programs to Boost Productivity." Nationally recognized trainer Carol

Hacker will show you how to launch and manage an effective recognition program to recharge productivity and commitment – without straining your corporate budget. For more information call (800) 274-6774 or [click here](#).

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