



Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar

*Your How-to Guide for Building an
Everyday Culture of Appreciation*

2018

Make 2018 the year you energize your organization with a coordinated employee recognition program that builds a fun, happy, engaged and productive workplace!

Here at gThankYou, we know how to hit “refresh” on workplace culture. We’re experienced at helping companies of all sizes and industries celebrate employees. We understand what goes into building a sustainable, vibrant culture of gratitude, and the importance of planning ahead to keep engagement goals on track.

Employee recognition is about so much more than end-of-the-year dinners and employee-of-the-month plaques. The most successful businesses know the importance of celebrating employees day in and day out!

How to Use This eBook

There is no “one size fits all” approach to recognizing workers.

That’s why we’ve designed this how-to eBook. We want to inspire you to bring your engagement to a higher level and find the recognition approach that works for your organization. You know your company best!

Our how-to guide walks you through planning for seasonal engagement and a wide variety of holidays, organized by month. Throughout the calendar, you’ll also find important stats, mini case studies, “anytime recognition” ideas and essential everyday tips for building a happier workplace through engagement and fun.

This isn’t a novel that needs to be read front to back. It is intended as a year-round reference guide — so skip ahead, go back, reread and return to it whenever you need a little creative inspiration. This is “choose your own adventure” engagement!

Why Now?

We live in an exciting time for HR leaders. New research into what drives employee engagement reveals there’s so much more we can be doing.

The response to innovate has been incredible, but innovations have yet to be widely adopted. Gallup’s 2017 State of the American Workplace report found that 70 percent of American workers are not engaged.

HR is in crisis mode, and change isn’t optional, the researchers concluded: “The old ways — annual reviews, forced rankings, outdated competencies — no longer achieve the intended results.”

The problem isn’t a lack of investment. Quite the opposite: employee recognition programs are a major investment for most companies. Yet much of this investment is wasted on recognition that doesn’t work.

A study by Bersin & Associates found that 87 percent of the \$46 billion spent on employee recognition goes toward ineffective tenure-

based recognition such as pins and awards dinners for senior employees. This type of recognition was developed more than a century ago in response to pressure from unions, according to Bersin. The spirit of these efforts was in the right place, but now we know it isn’t enough.

The latest science shows employees respond better to frequent celebrations and on-the-spot, peer-to-peer and results-based recognition. Not only that, but researchers are finally documenting the amazing effect successful employee recognition has on overall performance.

Appreciation drives engagement, which in turn drives productivity and profitability. The impact is substantial. The Bersin study found that companies that scored in the top 20 percent for building “recognition-rich culture” had 31 percent lower voluntary turnover rates — an outcome many CEOs would pay millions to achieve! Effective recognition doesn’t cost more. It’s simply smarter.

Getting Started

With so much innovation happening in the world of HR, now is the perfect time to evaluate your employee recognition needs — whether you’re starting from scratch or looking to polish an existing program.

First, a reality check. You can’t build an engaged workforce without the basics:

- fair pay
- safe working conditions
- trust in leadership
- meaningful work
- a culture of respect
- commitment from senior management

THAT LAST POINT IS CRITICAL: management needs to believe in the power of gratitude and the financial and cultural value of engagement. Leaders are your company’s engagement role models. Your HR team can throw its resources into a recognition program, but if management doesn’t care, employees will sense the disconnect and your efforts will fall flat.



6 Questions to Assess Your Company Recognition Needs

Your organization is unique. So are your recognition needs. Begin your planning by asking these six key questions to assess your company recognition needs:

- 1 Who is the target of your recognition program?**
 - A specific team
 - An office or other single location — plant, store, outlet, clinic, etc.
 - Distributed employees
 - The whole company
- 2 How will your company’s brand influence the tone and execution of engagement practices?**
- 3 What do you want to accomplish — a month from now, a year from now, five years from now?**
- 4 What are your metrics of success and how will you measure them?**
 - Annual survey
 - Instant or mobile-driven feedback
 - Retention rates
 - Customer satisfaction
- 5 What is your budget?**
 - On a shoestring
 - Moderate and targeted
 - Generous and sweeping
- 6 How does the size of your company affect your engagement approach?**

Small/Medium Company	
Benefit	Challenge
More personalized engagement activities	Even on a small scale, results still need to be tracked and measured
Ability to be more flexible, responsive	A smaller budget

Large Company	
Benefit	Challenge
Streamlined recognition program that allows employees to participate locally but be part of something bigger	Fewer chances for employees to interact personally with management



Ready for Take-Off!

Now comes the fun part. You’ve assessed your basic needs and approach, so you’re ready to start playing around with ideas. It’s your chance to get creative.

Creativity, incidentally, “holds a key role in the formula for employee engagement,” according to **TalentCulture**. Creativity can also be intimidating. The directive to “get creative!” can feel like a lot of pressure. Too often we think of creativity as an innate, mystical talent bestowed on a lucky few. But creativity is actually a natural process that everyone experiences.

Steve Jobs famously described creativity as “just connecting things.” That’s why we’ve put together this how-to guide: to help you make the connections that spark innovation and help you create a unique, effective employee engagement program that fits your organization.

January

The Kindness Cure to Stress

The thrill of the holidays is gone, parties over, gifts unwrapped and bills on the way. Combine all that with cold weather and the pressure of New Year's resolutions and you've got a recipe for an unfocused, unhappy and unproductive workforce in January.

Keep that stress in check. Don't let your engagement program go into hibernation! Now's the time to invigorate your workplace and set the tone for the year.

Job stress any time of year is "far and away" the major source of stress for American adults and has escalated progressively over the past few decades, according to the [American Institute of Stress](#). Stress is a "highly personalized phenomenon," and ability to manage it depends on environmental fit, personal coping skills and institutional support.

Escaping stress with beach vacations and big parties only lasts so long. Sustainable stress-management takes daily effort. Luckily, the seed for change is simple: kindness! When we're kind with ourselves and with others, we squeeze out stress and make room for success.

Beat the blahs and boost employee happiness this month with everyday engagement, wellness activities and low-key celebrations focused on building connections:

- Meditation classes to help employees learn mindfulness techniques
- Opportunities for physical breaks: ping-pong, yoga, basketball, Frisbee, walking, climbing, dance
- Free financial planning
- Cafeteria healthy meal options with take-home recipe cards
- Cooking classes that focus on easy, healthy and fast family meals
- Discounts at a local gym or on-site fitness classes
- Volunteer opportunities (kindness in action!)
- Surprise gifts like fresh flowers to brighten the office or \$5 pie gift certificates for National Pie Day on Jan. 23
- A Thank You note-writing party with all supplies provided — all employees need to bring is a idea of someone they want to thank!

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Don't Miss Celebration

NATIONAL THANK YOU MONTH — Start a gratitude habit by writing Thank You notes.

The best Thank You notes are:

- **Handwritten.** In the digital age, a handwritten note stands out.
- **Heartfelt.** When it comes to gratitude, feelings matter.
- **Personal.** Share an observation or anecdote.
- **Specific.** Explain exactly why you're grateful.
- **Timely.** Your "Thank You" has the most impact right away. Don't wait!
- **Delivered in Person.** If possible, deliver your letter with a handshake and big smile.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

NATIONAL TAKE THE STAIRS DAY (JAN. 10) — Take your workplace wellness goals one step at a time. Encourage employees to avoid elevators for one day, or take your team on a lunchtime lap around the building.

NATIONAL PIE DAY (JAN. 23) — Sharing a pie builds goodwill and brings colleagues together!

NATIONAL FUN AT WORK DAY (JAN. 28) — Have fun with a work-related game, or just whack a piñata!

Prioritize Workplace Wellbeing in 2018

Workplace wellbeing programs are the antidote to one of the biggest challenges facing HR: employee burnout. A 2017 survey showed 95 percent of HR pros believe **burnout is blocking employee retention**.

The stakes are too high not to prioritize employee wellbeing, according to HR Dive columnist Steve Alavi. Life expectancy for Americans is down, and chronic conditions like diabetes are on the rise.

Employers need to "take a major role in helping — even ensuring — that employees build healthy behaviors into their lives at work and at home," he writes. "Work shouldn't be an excuse for people not leading a healthy lifestyle."

Take these steps to prioritize wellbeing in your workplace:

1. **Know Your Challenges:** What are the wellness challenges in your region or industry? Check Gallup Healthways' [exhaustive health data reports](#).
2. **Go Green:** Employees in green-certified buildings are sick less, sleep better and have higher cognitive function, [a series of studies](#) found.
3. **Offer Financial Literacy Education:** Worry over money distracts employees from doing their best work.
4. **Invest in Mental Health:** Major depression is costly — by one estimate, it accounts for a 46.9-percent loss in productivity dollars per year — [so treating it early saves companies](#) in the long run.
5. **Favor the Carrot, Not the Stick:** Share budget-friendly rewards that have immediate, meaningful impact and reinforce wellbeing goals. Punishing employees for failing to meet health goals is discouraging. It doesn't entice them to try again. Instead, reward employee successes!

Mini-Case Study: Why PepsiCo's CEO Thanks Moms and Dads

PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi writes an average of **400 Thank You letters each year** to her employees' parents. She got the idea while visiting her own parents in India.

"When I got home and I sat in the living room, a stream of visitors and random people started to show up. They'd go to my mom and say, 'You did such a good job with your daughter. Compliments to you. She's CEO.' But not a word to me."

Nooyi realized it was her mother and her late father who were responsible for much of her success, and they deserved to reap the praise. She wanted to do the same for the parents of her executives at PepsiCo. The first paragraph is

always about what their child is doing at PepsiCo, followed by, "Thank you for the gift of your child to our company."

Nooyi says the letters open a "floodgate of emotions." Parents write back to tell her how honored they are.

The letters impress employees, too. Executives tell her, "This is the best thing that's happened to my parents. And it's the best thing that's happened to me."



Indra Nooyi

Key Stats

Two-thirds of today's employees report feeling "overwhelmed." (Deloitte)
Stress-related ailments cost the nation \$300 billion every year in medical bills and lost productivity. (AIS)

February

How Love Engages Employees

Does the phrase “love in the workplace” make you roll your eyes or reach for a sexual harassment complaint form? Research shows that creating a **culture of love** — not the romantic kind — is actually a smart and compassionate way to engage employees.

Sigal Barsade and Olivia (Mandy) O’Neill did their **longitudinal study on love in the workplace** in a hospital. They also sought data from 3,201 employees nationwide in seven industries, from financial services to real estate.

In all industries, the results were consistent: **“companionate love is a driver of engagement.”**

This platonic type of love “is a basic human emotion that has been largely neglected within the domain of organizational behavior,” Barsade and O’Neill write. “Employees who felt they worked in a loving, caring culture reported higher levels of satisfaction and teamwork. They showed up to work more often.”

This loving culture also had a direct impact on client outcomes. Patients at the hospital reported improved mood, quality of life and satisfaction, as well as fewer trips to the ER.

Emotional contagion plays in big role in the workplace.

We can “catch” emotions from each other like a cold virus, the researchers found. Facial expressions, body language, vocal tone and touch all contribute to the emotional health of a group.

“Pay attention to the emotions you’re expressing to employees every day. Your mood creates a cultural blueprint for the group.”

- Barsade and O’Neill

This Valentine’s Day, celebrate the power of love in the workplace. Leaders guided by companionate love have engaged, dedicated employees — the kind of employees who say “I love my job!” and mean it.



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Don’t Miss Celebration

WINTER OLYMPICS (FEB. 9-25) — Olympic athletes know a thing or two about practicing gratitude, grace under pressure, selflessness and work-life balance while on the job. Engage your employees with an Olympics-themed workplace celebration! Host a game-watching party with snacks from the countries represented, and be sure to focus the event on sharing gratitude and honoring excellence.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

SUPERBOWL MONDAY (FEB. 5) — The game and half-time show will be on everyone’s mind the Monday after, so instead of trying to keep everyone on task, host a quick post-Super Bowl get-together. Afterward, everyone will be ready to get to work!

VALENTINE’S DAY (FEB. 14) — Encourage employees to celebrate Valentine’s Day by sharing compassion with coworkers or volunteering together in the community.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY (FEB. 17) — The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has plenty of ideas at randomactsofkindness.org for building goodwill at work and in the community. Make a week of it: RAK Week is Feb. 11-17. Participate on social media with the hashtag #RAKweek2018. You can even nominate an employee or coworker as a “RAKtivist” and publicly recognize them for their kindness.

Why We Love Random Acts of Kindness in the Workplace

Writer Anne Herbert coined the phrase “random acts of kindness” in the early 1980s when she scribbled on a restaurant placemat, “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty.”

Here’s why we love random acts of kindness — on Random Acts of Kindness Day (Feb. 17) or anytime:

- 1. It breaks up routine.** An unexpected kind gesture lifts us out of our self-focus.
- 2. It has awesome ROI.** A simple smile has the power to spark a conversation that may lead to trading ideas or forging a priceless partnership.
- 3. It’s healthy.** Random acts of kindness don’t just benefit the receiver — they also boost the giver’s mental and physical health. A beaming smile is a positive indicator of longevity, as Ron Gutman discusses in his TED Talk, “[The Hidden Power of Smiling.](#)”
- 4. It’s contagious.** Practicing random kindness has a **domino effect**. Even witnessing acts of kindness can set off waves of goodwill.
- 5. It’s teachable.** Our willingness to help strangers is flexible and shaped by small changes in perception. A researcher at the University of Wisconsin at Madison observed alterations in brain function in study participants after just seven hours of **compassion training** — a “remarkable” turnaround, he said.

Key Stats

The workplace ranks last among places people express gratitude. In a John Templeton Foundation survey of 2,000 people, almost all said thanking colleagues “makes me feel happier and more fulfilled,” yet only 10 percent said they act on this impulse daily.



Mini-Case Study: Welcome Gifts Say ‘We’re Glad You’re Here’

Welcome gifts for new hires (and interns) send a message from day one that your company values and appreciates staff. They’re also **strategic**. New hires who go through a structured onboarding program are 58 percent more likely to be working with the company three years later.

At the San Francisco office of ad agency DDB, new employees on their first day are chauffeured to work in a Town Car. Flowers, a hoodie and a water bottle greet them at their desk. And all new hires at DDB receive a gift card to a local coffee shop where they can get to know their coworkers.

From the get-go, DDB is sending a welcoming message: *We’re glad you’re here. Come and join us!*

DDB’s welcome package aligns with company mission and culture. Whimsical, creative gifts are a good match for the creative types who work at ad agencies like DDB. Other companies focus on fun community-building or tech-savvy welcome gifts. If your company celebrates a **family-friendly culture**, your best choice are gifts the whole family can enjoy.



March

Employee Appreciation the Mister Rogers Way

Fred Rogers delighted children for decades on television, but even as adults we can learn and be inspired by his legacy. March 20 is Mister Rogers Day, or “Sweater Day,” a chance for people everywhere to wear a cardigan like the one he wore from 1963 to 2001 on Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.

Rogers was, unsurprisingly, a thoughtful boss. Here are six ways to model Rogers:

- 1. Listen, and Be Responsive:** Rogers was tirelessly responsive to viewers, often answering fan mail at length and considering their concerns. This has the same effect on six-year-olds as it does on 36-year-olds: people who feel heard and valued respond with loyalty.
- 2. Focus on Relationships:** He thought of retiring in the 1990s, according to the [New York Times](#), but “pressed on, partly because he felt responsible for the staff members who inhabited the real ‘Neighborhood,’ which had the simple warmth and loyal relationships of the make-believe version.”
- 3. Make Work Meaningful:** Rogers and his team thought of themselves as a sort of church congregation with a “sense of being involved in something bigger,” William Barker, voice of the puppet Dr. William Duck Platypus, told the Times.
- 4. Share Employee Gifts with the Whole Family:** Every summer, Rogers rented out an amusement park for his employees’ children to enjoy.
- 5. Be Authentic:** Rogers’ skilled storytelling and straight-forward manner worked on adults, too: he secured millions of dollars in funding for public television and children’s education with a [memorable speech before a senate subcommittee](#), leading one senator to remark, “Well, I’m supposed to be a pretty tough guy, and this is the first time I’ve had goosebumps for the last two days.”
- 6. Inspire, Don’t Rule:** Take it directly from Rogers: “There’s a world of difference between insisting on someone doing something and establishing an atmosphere in which that person can grow into wanting to do it.”

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Don’t Miss Celebration

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS (MARCH 20) — Plan participatory activities that focus on *creating* happiness, not just *being* happy. And say “Thank You”! Not only will you make someone’s day, but there’s a good chance the recipient will feel empowered to make someone else’s day, too. A chain reaction of gratitude is *happiness in action!*

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DAY (MARCH 2) — Celebrate with a fun activity and message of gratitude, or use the occasion to kick off a new appreciation program.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF AWESOMENESS (MARCH 10) — Show your inner awesomeness and honor the everyday awesomeness of your employees, coworkers and company! Remember Neil Pasricha’s “[The 3 A’s of Awesome](#)”: **Attitude, Awareness and Authenticity.**

PI DAY (MARCH 14) — Enjoy slices of pie together to celebrate the fascinating and mysterious mathematical constant known as *pi*, or 3.14159..., the never-ending number that results from calculating the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter. When it comes to gratitude, it turns out you actually *can* have your pie and eat it, too!



Quick Ideas for Employee Appreciation

Celebrations in the workplace are transformative because they help us “deal constructively with the intangible dynamics within us and within groups,” according to business consultant Francis Cholle.

Make a celebration of employee appreciation! Regular workplace celebrations that mark holidays or company-specific achievements “imply a certain level of ceremony and require time, but they are profoundly efficient in both the short and the long term,” Cholle writes in his LinkedIn post, “[The Importance of Rituals in the Workplace.](#)”

Sharing appreciation feels great and spreads positivity, too. Just as celebrating gratitude builds organizational health, gratitude is good for individual mental and physical health. Studies show again and again that sharing and receiving gratitude makes us more energetic, resilient and happy.

Here are last-minute ideas for celebrating Employee Appreciation Day (March 2):

- Walk around the office and personally thank each employee.
- Distribute bags of gold chocolate coins or fortune cookies with Thank You messages.
- Highlight a recent “win” for the team and celebrate it.
- Bring in breakfast or host an ice cream social.
- Invite fun, healthy or useful services into the workplace — hire on-site car washers, a staffed juice bar or a team of massage therapists to give 5-minute chair massages.

Key Stats

Happier people work harder. In a series of lab experiments at the University of Warwick, happiness correlated with a 12-percent increase in productivity. Lower happiness among study participants was systematically associated with lower productivity.



Mini-Case Study: The CEO Who Writes 7,400 Birthday Cards

Sheldon Yellen, CEO of the billion-dollar disaster relief and property restoration company [BELFOR Holdings, Inc.](#), writes a birthday card every year to each of his employees.

To keep up with the volume, he brings stacks of cards with him on plane trips, according to a [Business Insider profile](#).

He started the practice when he was hired on in 1985, to get to know his coworkers. Today he handwrites 7,400 birthday cards annually, one for each of his employees. He tries to include a personal touch. He’ll refer back to a memory he and the employee share, or a conversation they had.

He also makes a habit of writing Thank You notes. When he learns “of random acts of kindness being performed in the field,” he makes sure “their efforts don’t go unnoticed.”

Over time, the gesture has made for a more compassionate, gracious workplace: “It’s woven into our company culture,” he said. The experience has taught him that the value of gratitude keeps coming back in spades — and it “doesn’t have to cost a thing.”



April

Why Celebrating Small Wins Engages Employees

Employee recognition is a billion dollar industry, yet much of this money gets wasted on efforts that don't work and can even demotivate employees.

What gives? The secret is to **recognize employees regularly**, not just once a year. Praise for everyday wins builds a confident, productive workplace.

Don't blow your annual budget on a one-time recognition event. Events alone aren't enough. Special celebrations are a lively part of workplace culture but they're only effective when backed by everyday recognition.

Recognition should be a daily habit. Here's how:

1. Think beyond the big holidays

Celebrating together at the holidays is an important cultural tradition, but that holiday cheer won't last into spring, let alone August. There is no "off season" for recognition. Seek out small, low-key reasons to celebrate throughout the year.

2. Tie your recognition to performance

Employees need to know why they're being recognized so they know which good behaviors to replicate in the future. Put it in writing to make your gratitude memorable.

3. Involve leaders

Praise means the most when it comes from the C-suite. Encourage leadership to make a habit of recognizing employees.

4. Reward with meaningful gifts

Everybody loves money, but it actually isn't the top employee motivator. A thoughtful gesture is what employees remember, not the once-a-year bonus. Choose practical non-cash gifts accompanied by a few words of sincere gratitude.

5. Fuel internal motivation

Gallup research shows that "personal satisfaction or pride in work" is one of the top motivators of continued excellent work. Everyday recognition feeds our emotional need to feel useful. Ultimately it boosts employees' internal drive to feel accomplished.



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Don't Miss Celebration

ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY (APRIL 25) — Administrative professionals deserve our gratitude now more than ever. They're doing *more*, for *more* people. Your administrative staff is no longer on the periphery of your daily business operation but at the heart of what makes your company and workplace **culture thrive**.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

EASTER (APRIL 1) — This widely celebrated family occasion has cultural traditions that will appeal to everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. Easter appreciation shares in the joy of a new season and celebrates the gratitude and sense of renewal that come with it.

WORLD HEALTH DAY (APRIL 7) — The perfect opportunity to kick off a workplace wellness program! The World Health Organization started this day to focus attention on important health issues: 2017's theme was "Depression: Let's Talk." Check out the 2018 theme and **find promotional ideas and materials here**.

EARTH DAY (APRIL 22) AND ARBOR DAY (dates vary by region) — Roll up your sleeves and get to work together for a healthier planet! Arbor Day dates vary by regional growing season, so check **arborday.org** to find the date where you live and to find opportunities for your team to get involved in tree-planting activities.

5 Budget Tools for Engagement

Engage employees effectively — and keep your accounting department happy!

1. Just Say "Thank You"

A sincere "Thank You" makes everyone feel good — giver and receiver. It sets up a chain reaction of goodwill. Share your "thanks" frequently and it will influence the entire workgroup.

2. Start a Fun Weekly Tradition

Regular, fun activities at work give employees a well-earned break, a chance to connect and something to look forward to. Low-cost options? Try bagels and juice on Monday mornings, Ultimate Frisbee Fridays over the lunch hour, or a cross-department TGIF — whatever best fits your company culture and people!

3. Get in a Thank You Note Habit

Carve out weekly time to write Thank You notes. Encourage others to join you ("Thank You Thursdays"). Provide stationery for managers to do the same.

4. Harness the Power of Social Recognition

When you recognize employees on social media — a shoutout on Twitter, for instance — you invite them to share the recognition with their network, too. Socially shared recognition spreads gratitude, positivity and pride in your company.

5. Offer Flex Time or Time Off

Give the gift of time. An afternoon off demonstrates appreciation and trust. Even a few hours off is good for mental health and motivation, so don't be surprised if your employees return to work refreshed and energized. You might even recoup the cost of their time off in increased productivity!

Key Stats

How important is a strong sense of company culture? Average job turnover at a company with a strong culture is 13.9 percent. At a company with a weak culture, it jumps to 48.4 percent — yikes! (Columbia University)

Mini-Case Study: The Family-Friendly Workplace

How has **Wegmans**, a regional chain of supermarkets, made it 20 years in a row on Fortune's list of "100 Best Companies to Work For"?

Wegmans employees continually praise the company's **family-friendly work environment**.

Besides excellent health benefits for the whole family, employees enjoy schedule flexibility, a rarity in the retail industry. The flexibility to work around a child's preschool schedule or Grandma's doctor appointments gives employees peace of mind and better on-the-job focus.

Wegmans treats its workers like family. Employees are eligible for \$5 million in college scholarships and receive extraordinary education opportunities. For example, the company sends butchers to Colorado

and South America to learn about beef and deli managers to Wisconsin and Europe to learn about cheese.

Wegmans also has great everyday perks. Supermarket managers at Wegmans celebrate each employee's birthday with a cake for the whole staff and provide hot chocolate for employees working outside in the cold.

All that investment in employee happiness is paying off. Revenue climbs year after year, and the company is rolling out new stores. In 2017, Consumer Reports named Wegmans the top grocery in the country.



May

What's Trending? Ongoing Feedback!

Just 20 percent of employees “strongly agree” that their performance is managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work, according to [2017 Gallup research](#).

Meanwhile, organizations are making overly confident assumptions about the effectiveness of their employee management systems — wasting “tens of thousands of hours and tens of millions of dollars on activities that not only don't work but also drive out top talent,” Jim Harter, Gallup's chief scientist, writes.

His team's research paper, “Re-Engineering Performance Management,” calls for a **shift in thinking**:

“Organizations must begin to philosophically and functionally shift from performance management to performance development.”

Employees now expect an “ongoing conversation” in place of or in addition to an annual review. This requires managers to “think of themselves in a new way: as a coach, not a boss.”

Accountability still matters. Employees are 2.5 times more likely to be engaged with managers who hold them accountable for their performance, but this engagement is strongest when managers take a conversation-driven approach of **“ongoing feedback.”**

Ongoing feedback means opening up two-way communication — for instance, making sure employees understand their goals and discussing questions they have on the spot.

“People tend to find goals to be more fair and motivating when they have a voice in setting them,” according to Gallup.

Another perk? Ongoing feedback allows more opportunities for recognition. It gets results faster. The old model of performance management rewarded a handful of major accomplishments once a year, at best, and got unreliable results.

“By celebrating an array of achievements, managers and employees can create a dialogue about how to experience these ‘winning moments’ more often by enabling people to do what they do best more frequently.”

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Don't Miss Celebration

WORLD LAUGHTER DAY (MAY 6) — We celebrate World Laughter Day by laughing. It's that simple! Even fake laughter will do — no joke. Real or not, laughing is aerobic and exercises underused muscles. Besides the health benefits, experts say laughter is an indispensable method for building teamwork, solidifying social bonds and increasing motivation, happiness and job engagement.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

TEACHER APPRECIATION DAY (MAY 8) — Thank the people at your company who make workplace learning and mentoring happen! Teacher Appreciation Day is part of Teacher Appreciation Week, May 7-11.

NATIONAL RECEPTIONIST DAY (MAY 9) — Your receptionists are the face of your company and brighten everyone's day, so brighten theirs for a change!

NATIONAL EMPLOYEE HEALTH & FITNESS DAY (MAY 16) — Get your workplace moving! Hand out “trail” maps of walks around your building and local points of interest. Have a contest with prizes for most miles logged over the month.

MEMORIAL DAY (MAY 28) — If your business stays open over the holiday weekend, earn your employees' gratitude by celebrating at work. Host a picnic lunch or have management cover operations while workers enjoy a break to watch the local Memorial Day Parade.

Celebrate Nurses This Month

Nurse Appreciation Week is May 6-12, and **everyone benefits** when nurses feel appreciation! At least 30 years of research consistently demonstrates a link between nurse job satisfaction and patient outcomes.

Want to engage with nurses beyond the basics, like ongoing feedback, on-the-spot recognition and meaningful tokens of gratitude? **Involve nurses in patient care decision-making.**

Typically, nurses are the face of medical care but don't have much say in how care is provided; so start asking questions! Experiments in nurse-led initiatives are proving that nurses often know best.

“If you're looking to improve the quality of care and reduce costs, try talking to the people working on the front lines every day — talk to a nurse,” writes Forbes contributor Robert J. Szczerba in the article, **“Looking To Transform Healthcare? Ask A Nurse.”** He cites an overwhelming body of evidence that supports increasing nurse consultation.

One study found that nurse-driven initiatives decrease patient length of stay, decrease use of ventilators and cut the number of ICU complications, injuries and infections in half.

Key Stats

Talent analytics help companies like Starbucks, Limited Brands and Best Buy identify the precise value of employee engagement. **At Best Buy, for example, a 0.1 percent improvement in a store's engagement returns \$100,000 in annual operating income.** ([Harvard Business Review](#))



Mini-Case Study: Want Employee Loyalty? Ask This 90-Year-Old How

Elena Griffing, 90, is a **living testament to employee loyalty**. In 2016 she celebrated 70 years at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley, CA. She was just 19 on her first day in 1946. Back then, the average American made \$2,500 a year, a gallon of gas cost 15 cents and Griffing was a member of the Frank Sinatra Fan Club. In 70 years, Griffing has taken only four days of sick leave. She tells the San Francisco Chronicle, *“Some people retire at 65, but good grief, I was just getting my second wind at 65.”*

What are the secrets to Griffing's loyalty?

Job ownership: *“I can't wait to come to work every day. This is my hospital.”*

Opportunities to learn: *“Every day, I learn and learn and learn. ... It's been such a joy for me.”*

Knowing her work matters:

“I love watching people get well and get better. Truly, it's the patient that counts. If it's helping someone, it's my bag.” (Her boss says she's a “huge benefit for patients.”)

Finally, her employer recognizes her. “Every day on the job is a celebration” is how the Associated Press describes Griffing's work life. Part of this is simply who Griffing is — a spunky lady with an infectious attitude — but her employer, by honoring and celebrating who she is, creates a work environment where it's possible for every day to be a celebration.



June

Workplace Volunteerism: It's Time to Get to Work

Employees now expect opportunities for workplace volunteerism. **More than 60 percent** of employees even want employers to offer paid leave for volunteering.

The new generation of corporate philanthropy and workplace volunteerism **focuses on year-round goals**, not just an annual "done in a day" event or seasonal giving drive, according to Forbes contributor Ryan Scott.

"What most engages employees is what inspires them, and inspiration comes from a culture of giving back based on a demonstrable dedication to results," Scott writes. "The days of lip service are over. It's time to get to work."

Two examples of workplace volunteering done right:

- **UPS** employees at a California airport hub **contribute more to United Way** than any other local company. They help pack food for hungry kids, paint murals at school-makeover projects and "get into the community in those brown T-shirts whenever there is an opportunity," writes Gregory Bradbard, president of Inland Empire United Way.

It's good for business. UPS has discovered that employees who are engaged in the community perform 20 percent better and are 87 percent less likely to leave the organization.

- **MAE Plastic Surgery**, a medical practice in a Chicago suburb, has provided pro-bono surgeries to gunshot victims and others in need, and the doctors on staff have volunteered abroad. The company also participated in an all-staff volunteer day at a nearby **Feed My Starving Children** warehouse. MAE's Dr. Michael Epstein reflected on the experience in a **Chicago Tribune article**:

"When you do something like this, where everyone is involved, from our nurses and aestheticians to our office manager and patient coordinators, it makes a positive impact on each of us. We felt fulfilled, as a team, because we took the time to give back and do for others."

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Don't Miss Celebration

SAY SOMETHING NICE DAY (JUNE 1) — Practice your gratitude with compliments on Say Something Nice Day! A perfect compliment reaches employees' hearts, not just their heads, and makes them feel that you really understand and care.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

NATIONAL SAFETY MONTH — Safety is a team effort so celebrate your team! Host a BBQ workplace meal and make sure all shifts can participate.

NATIONAL DOUGHNUT DAY (JUNE 1) — Treat your staff to everyone's favorite treat for breakfast (or anytime!).

SUMMER SOLSTICE (JUNE 21) — Celebrate the start of a new season (and the longest daylight of the year) with a company grill-out or other summery activity.

UNITED WAY 'DAY OF ACTION' (JUNE 22) — Communities around the world come together on this day to harness the volunteer spirit. It's a great opportunity to kickstart workplace volunteerism programming! Day of Action's mission, in part, is to demonstrate "what people and businesses working together can accomplish for the good of the community." Get employees involved in and excited about giving back, and build workplace gratitude!

PUBLIC SERVICE DAY (June 23) — Embrace the spirit of public service and civic responsibility with a team volunteer outing or by showing gratitude to local public service workers with a treat (maybe doughnuts...).

5 Tips for Giving Better Compliments

1. **Before you speak, ask yourself why.** You'll land on a better, more specific compliment this way. Why did the employee give the best presentation? How exactly did the employee's performance make this month's sales so outstanding?
2. **Don't fake it.** Give the compliment that you really believe, not the one you think you "should" give. Compliments only work if you are authentic and sincere.
3. **Acknowledge the person's efforts beyond their skills.** What did it take for them to perform so well? What obstacles or fears did they overcome?
4. **Describe the impact.** People love to hear how their efforts positively affect others. Did their attitude inspire you? Do you have statistics that show how the employee saved time or money, brought in new business, or increased customer satisfaction? Help employees understand how they *directly* help the business and its people.
5. **Use words of appreciation.** Conclude with a simple "Thank You" and emphasize your gratitude!

Key Stats

Feel like a million bucks after receiving a compliment? It isn't just a turn of phrase. A **2012 Japanese study** found that compliments activate the same part of the brain that's activated by a gift of cash — literally making praise a form of emotional currency!



Mini-Case Study: The Legacy of the Doughnut Lassies

Always the first Friday of June, **National Doughnut Day** has a history going back a century — and appreciation is at the heart of it.

During World War I, **The Salvation Army** sent 250 volunteers to France to set up small huts near the front lines where they could give U.S. soldiers spiritual and emotional support. Demoralized and homesick soldiers arrived seeking comfort. It had been raining steadily for 36 days straight.

Using the few rations they had available to them, the volunteers began frying doughnuts in pans, or even in soldiers' helmets when nothing else was available. The aroma of frying doughnuts attracted soldiers and reminded them of home. The Salvation Army's "**Doughnut Lassies**" were born!

The Doughnut Lassies continued to serve along the front lines during WWII. Their doughnuts became a symbol for the appreciation, comfort and support the soldiers needed.

To this day, the Salvation Army serves doughnuts, along with warm meals and hydration, to those in need. Celebrate the legacy of the Lassies with doughnut treats for the whole team!



July

Peer-to-Peer Recognition that 'Wows'

Peer-to-peer recognition empowers employees to share appreciation and builds a company culture of gratitude.

According to *"The Rise of the Creative Class"* author Richard Florida, earning peer respect drives modern worker motivation. His research finds that more and more employees today are motivated, at least in part, by peer recognition.

Managerial recognition is critical, of course, but peer-to-peer recognition harnesses the intimate, day-to-day knowledge coworkers have of our work. Here's how to create a peer-to-peer recognition program that "Wows" your workplace!

1. Align recognition with business goals

Reinforce key business goals via your peer-to-peer recognition program. What behaviors or results do you want to reinforce? Great customer service, safety, collaboration, new hire training, etc.

2. Provide a working structure

Set the requirements of the program — the who, what, when, why and how.

3. Choose appropriate recognition gifts

Select recognition gifts that match the effort involved. "Big effort" gifts should be less frequently given and have higher value. Celebrating great day-to-day efforts may warrant a \$5 Ice Cream Gift Certificate or a low-cost paper shower of "thank you" confetti. Consider your budget and culture.

4. Empower employees

Solicit employee feedback in program development and be open to improvements along the way! You want them to have ownership in this program.

5. Inspire your workplace

Have your whole workplace benefit from an award. Give award winners a round of applause, publicize winners on "applause" or "gratitude" boards or publish winner results electronically. Sharing gratitude is contagious and, if supported, can make your whole workplace feel valued and proud to be working for your company.

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Don't Miss Celebration

INTERN APPRECIATION DAY (JULY 9) — Your interns are potential future employees, so make the most of this opportunity to engage them! On Intern Appreciation Day, share a small gift, a Thank You card and treats to let your interns know their time and efforts are appreciated and that they're part of the company, if only for a few months.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

INDEPENDENCE DAY (JULY 4) — If your employees work on the 4th of July, be sure they get a chance to celebrate. Host a potluck with a "red, white and blue" menu and hand out gift certificates for the All-American dessert, pie!

NATIONAL ICE CREAM DAY (JULY 15) — A classic reward for a job well done! Ice cream is a treat everyone enjoys.

SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR APPRECIATION DAY (JULY 27) — System administrators are the unsung heroes who keep your network secure, computers running and printers jam-free. Thank them (and your IT department) with a party, treats and Thank You cards from the whole staff.

NATIONAL PICNIC MONTH — Picnics are low-pressure social occasions perfect for mingling and building camaraderie. Keep it simple with a Friday afternoon barbecue on-site, or plan a family party at a nearby park pavilion with games and kids' activities.

Successful On-Boarding for Summer Interns

An internship is a chance to engage with potential future employees. Don't miss the opportunity to make a good impression.

Be Welcoming

As soon as your intern accepts an offer and has a start date, send a small gift with a personal note of welcome. A week later, send information highlighting your company's culture, perks and achievements to get them excited about the possibilities.

Calm First-Day Jitters

Even the most eager, dedicated intern is likely inexperienced and in need of guidance. It may be their very first time working in a professional environment. They're excited, scared and confused — all at once! On their first day, introduce interns to your team and explain what each member does. Assign an employee as a "buddy" for interns when they have questions.

Keep It Positive

Interns need to know the rules, but be positive about it. The National Association of Colleges and Employers advises, "Be very clear about your expectations for their workplace conduct in the context that your greatest goal is that they have a successful internship with you."

Key Stats

Peer-to-peer recognition is 35.7 percent more likely to have a positive impact on financial results than manager-only recognition. But don't stop there! The most successful programs also facilitate peers to share value awards. Value-based recognition is key to building a "magnetic employer brand." (SHRM/Globeforce)

Let Interns Know the Difference They're Making

As you build trust with interns, gradually give them more responsibility. Show them the impact of their work as soon as possible.

"Task significance is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction for interns. Interns are likely to be more satisfied if their work significantly impacts other people and the organization."
— Employer's Resource Council

Send Them Off with Gratitude

The perfect send-off on an intern's last day is a small gift, "Thank You" card and treats for the whole team. Put your gratitude to work in practical ways, too. Is your intern deserving of a letter of recommendation? Do it right away while your impressions are fresh.

Mini-Case Study: The U.S. Army Workplace Culture

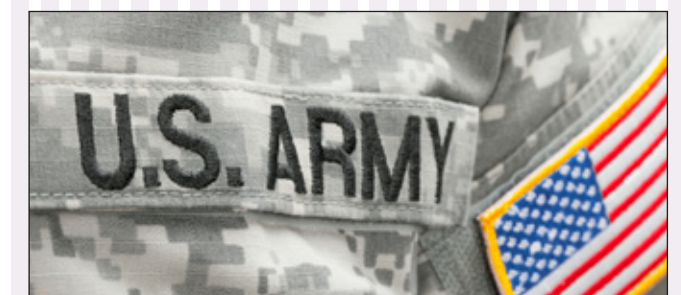
Tens of thousands of positive **Indeed** and **Glassdoor** reviews show people love working for the U.S. Army. Why? A **"culture of responsibility"** that leads to better communication, faster problem-solving and a sense of community, according to research by Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. Takeaways for the rest of us:

Make it easy to share ideas. The Army uses interdepartmental message boards, conference calls, email blasts, after-action reviews and more to help employees communicate.

Empower solutions, not blame. The Army expects employees to move quickly past blame and onto the next step: solutions. Excuses or apologies won't do. The at-fault employee is expected to help find a solution.

Seek feedback. Employees are eager to discuss issues and problem-solve when the conversation is personal (their team, their workload).

Take recognition seriously. The Morale, Welfare and Recreation division has a robust **Employee Award Program** that facilitates peer-to-peer recognition and encourages Army leaders to thank deserving employees.



August

Summertime Employee Engagement

Nobody wants to be like Gary Lumbergh, the despised **Office Space** boss who tells his employees to “go ahead and come in” **Saturday (and Sunday)**, but what do you do on Friday afternoons as employee motivation wafts away in the summer breeze?

Take advantage of summer by trying these **positive strategies to get employees re-engaged!**

1. Offer Flexible Schedules

According to Brigham Young University research, workers with flexible hours “tend to work more intensely than their counterparts with more rigid office hours.” Why? Employees are grateful for the freedom to choose where and when to work and want to “pay it back.”

2. Provide your version of TGIF

Make Friday afternoons something to look forward to. Choose a theme that fits your culture and company values — teambuilding, learning new skills, giving back, or innovation. Have a hip young culture? Have naked Fridays — serve Naked juice, play games and have themed t-shirts made. More traditional? Have casual Fridays, give the afternoon off or close operations early for inter-department sporting events.

3. Take it outside whenever possible

A little sunshine raises spirits. Provide a picnic table for lunch, breaks or meetings.

4. Invest in teambuilding

Let your workplace have some fun while building relationships. Choose team-building activities that make sense for your company culture. Start a sport or game league, get everyone involved in a community service opportunity or host interdepartmental lunches.

5. Offer summer learning opportunities

Summertime is a great time to learn new skills. Offer early morning or evening classes that keep employees interested and engaged.

6. Keep recognizing!

Make sure your employee recognition program doesn't take a vacation. Workers need to feel valued and important year-round.

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Don't Miss Celebration

Friendship Day (Aug. 5) — Friendship among coworkers has been on the decline for decades. As the workplace has become more transactional, experts say we're having “plenty of productive conversations but fewer meaningful relationships.” We're missing out. **Workplace friendships** drive great organizational culture. A study by Stanford University researchers found that more communal organizations “are better at resolving work-family issues and foster long-term employment relations.”

So skip the small talk. Discussing success with colleagues is motivational. Self-disclosure and nonwork-related topics can forge a closeness that makes coworkers more collaborative, productive and accountable — and those are conversations that can only happen in a culture that values and supports friendships.

Start with games, sports and meals. Playing and eating together are two easy ways to foster friendship. Another idea: establish a company “alumni network” to encourage employees to invest in long-term relationships.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE WEEK (AUG. 1-7) — Making life at work simpler takes cooperation and cultural changes. Promote activities focused on well-being: mindfulness, decluttering, time-management and self-care.

NATIONAL TELL-A-JOKE DAY (AUG. 16) — Humor breaks the ice, sparks creative thinking and improves teamwork. For inspiration, try **The Oatmeal's Dumb Jokes That Are Funny** or **Reader's Digest's “1000s of Our Best Clean Jokes.”**

Recharge Your Engagement Program with a “Think Week”

Headed out for vacation? Pack a book or two about building employee happiness! It'll help recharge your engagement strategy for the coming year.

A calm environment is the best place to learn new perspectives and spark innovation — just ask Bill Gates. Every year, the Microsoft co-founder goes into seclusion for a “**think week.**” During his week away from the daily grind, Gates reads up on big-picture analyses related to his current work and the future of technology. It used to be an all-paper process, but now he reads digitally and adds in comments that his employees can see and respond to in real time.

A “think week” is different from a working vacation. Instead of trying to keep up with the daily stream of emails and decisions, you're turning off email notifications and taking the time to consider a bird's-eye view of your industry and professional goals.

“If you can't take a week off, even a day or a few hours away from the office can provide just enough time and perspective to provide insights,” writes Tanner Christensen in the 99U post, “**Why You Need a ‘Think Week’ Like Bill Gates.**”

What will you pack in your beach bag to inspire better employee engagement? For book ideas, see the Celebrating Work blog post “**9 Great Beach Reads on Building Employee Happiness.**”



Key Stats

Need a good excuse to take a break? A person's ability to think creatively increases about 60 percent when they abandon that office chair for a stroll around the block. (Stanford University)

Mini-Case Study: The ‘Good Feeling’ of Doing Good

As part of a nationwide Honda Service Week, employees at a Honda dealership in Newton, New Jersey **teamed up to volunteer** at a community resource center for abuse victims. The team tackled everything from organizing the center's food pantry to mulching the grounds, trimming hedges, renovating a bathroom, painting the entrance and performing carpentry and odd jobs.

The center's executive director was “blown away” by everything the Honda employees did to help. “I was moved to tears in a good way when I arrived to work Monday morning to see these volunteers busy at work in and around our building everywhere,” she told a local newspaper. “It was inspiring. It was a good reminder that love and compassion wins.”

The feeling was mutual for Honda employees. One reflected, “It's a good feeling, once the project is over, that you participated in helping with something that is going to change lives.”



September

Recognizing a Distributed Workforce

A personal touch — smile, handshake or in-person chat — boosts employee recognition. But how do you build those connections when employees travel, work remotely or are scattered across multiple locations? Recognizing a distributed workforce demands organization, consistency and accountability.

Remote employees can “feel isolated, undervalued and out of touch with what matters most at corporate,” according to “[The Orange Revolution](#)” authors [Chester Elton](#) and [Adrian Gostick](#). Luckily, distributed workforce recognition done *right* has “tremendous benefits for both sides: retaining and getting the most out of talented employees who work in diverse parts of the country or world.”

What do distributed workers need to feel recognized?

- 1. Time and Attention:** The key with distributed workers is creating the feeling of connectedness. They value management’s time and visibility. Schedule regular and frequent check-ins and videoconferences; meet face-to-face whenever possible.
- 2. Participation Opportunities:** Reach out and involve everyone! Ensure that all workers understand your ideas and directives, and listen for their suggestions.
- 3. Fairness:** Keep track of where, when and how your company recognition program works. Thank You gifts shouldn’t fall through the cracks. If the main office is having a pizza party, send remote workers a pizza gift certificate and videoconference them in to join the party!
- 4. Trust:** Establishing trust is critical between supervisors and remote workers. Supervisors need to be empowered to manage remote workers differently. Trust is the foundation of engagement with a distributed workforce.
- 5. Regular Recognition:** Don’t wait for annual milestones or holidays — recognize and reward remote employee achievements regularly! Even a quick “thank you” email, text or phone call has a big impact. Employees who don’t regularly interact with company leadership especially value casual, everyday appreciation.

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Don’t Miss Celebration

WORLD GRATITUDE DAY (SEPT. 21) — Need another reason to celebrate gratitude — besides its profound effect on happiness, social engagement and motivation? Here’s another: health!

In stressful situations, grateful people demonstrate lower spikes in blood pressure. This resilience exists on a *biological* level! It explains why grateful people are able to bounce back from stress or hardships more quickly.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

LABOR DAY (SEPT. 3) — Send employees off for the long weekend with a company-wide, all-family picnic or outdoor family movie night.

POSITIVE-THINKING DAY (SEPT. 13) — Positive thinking is a conscious choice. Inspire it in employees by handing out fortune cookies with positive messages tucked inside.

NATIONAL TRUCK DRIVER APPRECIATION WEEK (Sept. 9-15) — Appreciation is missing for many of today’s truck drivers. The prospect of automation in the industry is making truckers feel undervalued, under-appreciated and nervous about their future. Yet trucking continues to be crucial to the economy, and drivers continue to be in high demand. Go the extra mile for driver appreciation this week! Trucking is often lonely work, so focus on recognition that forges a personal connection and builds a sense of purpose.

Back-to-School: An Employee Engagement Opportunity

Employee appreciation typically focuses on recognition for what happens in the workplace, but a comprehensive program also considers what happens on the outside!

During the school year, your employees face demanding school-related obligations. Be sure to value employee time both at and outside of work to build engagement.

Offer flex hours

Allow parents flex hours so they can keep their commitment to work and parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights and college orientation weekends. Be sensitive to second- and third-shift workers, who face even bigger scheduling challenges. Businesses that promote a culture of flexibility have a higher worker commitment and lower turnover rate that benefits everyone (not just parents!), according to [CNBC](#).

Invest in workplace wellness

Offer a class in healthy school lunch making or provide lunchtime exercise opportunities. For many parents, it could be the only chance for “me time.” Healthy habits build a healthy work-life balance, and family-supporting work policies keep employees productive, happy and focused.

Family-inclusive rewards

Share family-inclusive gifts such as certificates for groceries or casual restaurants or tickets to an amusement park or local baseball game. Employees appreciate gifts they can enjoy with the whole family, and busy parents juggling responsibilities especially value gifts that are convenient, versatile and practical.

Key Stats

Recognizing remote workers may soon be the rule, not the exception. Between 80% and 90% of the U.S. workforce says they would like to work remotely at least part-time. Studies repeatedly show that employees at Fortune 1000 companies are not at their desk 50-60% of the time. ([Global Workplace Analytics](#))



Mini-Case Study: The Real Heroes of Your Company Story

Every organization has a story about how it succeeds. Who are the heroes?

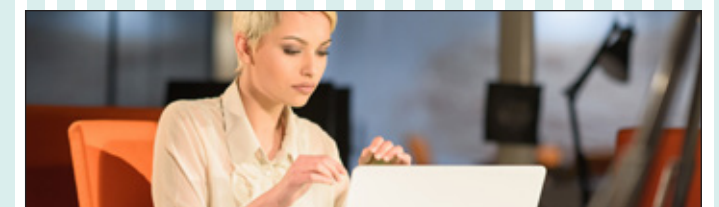
Leadership coach and author Tanveer Naseer writes, “When it comes to storytelling, it’s easy for us to imagine ourselves being the heroes of our organization’s story thanks to our leadership role. And yet, the simple truth is that as leaders, we serve as the mentor to the **real heroes of our organization’s story** — our employees.”

Consider this example of recognition storytelling from Globoforce:

“Jenny, thank you for staying late yesterday to put together a slide deck for our client presentation. It was filled with impressive statistics based on their business model. Because of your hard work and thoughtful analysis, the meeting went off like

a dream. The client was very impressed with your thorough understanding of their business and so was I! This is a fantastic start for our future relationship with them. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to quality!”

Who’s the hero here? Jenny! This is a great example of how a leader can turn an opportunity for appreciation into a mini-story with the employee as the star. No doubt Jenny heard it and not only felt accomplished but was eager to do it all again for the next client.



October

Let's Make Work Fun

Ready to blow off steam? Go to work! Social-science researchers are discovering some serious benefits to play in the workplace as Stuart Brown explains in his TED Talk, "Play Is More Than Just Fun."

Play boosts creativity and productivity because it **opens up new neural connections** in the brain, according to Fox News "Health @ Work."

"When you're fully engaged in play, you lose some of your psychological barriers and stop censoring or editing your thoughts. This allows creative ideas to flow more freely," Fox News' Laurie Tarken writes.

According to SHRM, "a fun work culture has more to do with **coworker interactions and job responsibilities** than formal activities." Ideally, playfulness folds into daily responsibilities. It can be "as simple as affording employees time to read about new trends and innovations in their field or industry, or trusting them to make decisions that might have immediate impact on customer satisfaction."

5 Tips for Building a Culture of Fun

- 1. Be optimistic** — Positivity opens up creativity. In a meeting, ask everyone to go around and share one great thing that happened since you last gathered.
- 2. Expand your definition of "games"** — Think beyond Scrabble, charades and basketball. For instance, your team could devise a game to solve an actual problem the company is facing.
- 3. Brainstorm** — It gets the creative juices flowing and allows for idea-sharing without judgment.
- 4. Encourage diversity of ideas** — Do your engineers talk with your sales associates, or customer service with product development? Create diverse teams that can tackle big-picture issues.
- 5. Celebrate often** — Celebrations force us to stop and live in the moment, which is a key element of play!

Welcome
to the party

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Don't Miss Celebration

MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY (OCT. 28) — **Make A Difference Day** is all about helping — a celebration of neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteerism helps build a connected, community-engaged workforce culture.

When employees see senior executives in jeans and t-shirts on a Saturday morning working side-by-side with everyone else, it builds a culture of inclusion. Volunteering together also switches up the communication hierarchy and improves workplace collaboration.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

NATIONAL CUSTODIAL WORKERS DAY (OCT. 2) — Custodial work isn't clearly connected to company goals, yet it is crucial to everyday operations. Have management publicly recognize your custodial staff for creating a clean, safe and comfortable workplace.

NATIONAL BOSS DAY (OCT. 16) — Workplace leaders are engagement role models, so be sure they get the recognition they give!

HALLOWEEN (OCT. 31) — People love Halloween. According to **Harris Poll**, it ranks third among U.S. adults for favorite holiday, outranking the Fourth of July, Memorial Day and even "my birthday." It's also naturally geared toward creative, active engagement activities, from carving pumpkins to making costumes!

Attract Talent with a Gratitude-Rich Employer Brand

"Today's companies must market their brand not just to consumers but to potential hires, too," according to **TalentCulture**.

Across all industries, recruitment has a come along way. It used to be "a sea of the same stock photos, boilerplate text and career sites with slogans like, 'A world of opportunity,'" according to Amplify Talent founder **Lars Schmidt**.

Of course, stock photos and generic slogans are not effective at letting potential employees know what it's really like to work for your company.

Storytelling, grounded in gratitude, gives your employer brand an authentic message. **Gratitude is the magic ingredient** in any employer brand communication plan because potential employees want to know how your company values and appreciates its workers.

"Storytelling allows companies to humanize their culture," Schmidt writes.

For example, an internal team at **Oracle** asked employees what they loved about working there. Their stories became quotes and then video for marketing. Using employee voices and images wasn't just good for Oracle's employer brand. Employees felt rewarded and acknowledged, too.

Best of all, the success of a story-driven, gratitude-rich employer brand like Oracle's isn't driven by how much is spent on developing it. That's "a great equalizer for smaller companies in competitive markets," says Schmidt.

Key Stats

Babies laugh 300 to 400 times a day. By the time we're 35, we laugh only about 15 times a day. We also laugh much less on weekdays than on weekends, according to Gallup. Yet laughter "is productivity's greatest ally," says Eric Tsytsylin, Stanford Graduate School of Business. Far from a workplace distraction, he says laughter actually has a profoundly positive impact on our brains, bodies and behavior.



Mini-Case Study: 'Epic' Employee Engagement

Fast-growing software company Epic Systems has a reputation for good pay, great culture and fabulous on-site amenities at its rural Wisconsin campus. CEO Judy Faulkner founded Epic in 1979 with two assistants. Now she employs 9,000 and oversees annual sales of \$2.5 billion. The company's success is built on **her principles and unique approach**:

Be Present and Engaged as CEO. When Epic donated a fire truck to a local fire department, Faulkner showed up to the ceremony in costume, excited to participate.

Be Honest. Transparency is what "we teach our people to do. And I think that really also frees them," she says.

Tell a Good Company Story. Faulkner absolutely believes in "the power of the story," even for linear-minded tech folks. She "paints a really strong picture" of the company mission to motivate employees.

Have Fun! Beyond the playfulness of the Epic campus — there's a Harry Potter-themed castle — Faulkner expects the work to be fun, too. To wit, she approaches client meetings as friendly get-to-know-you sessions: "Whether they choose us or whether they don't choose us, I want to have fun meeting them. I want to learn who they are. I want to learn what they do," she said.

Epic

November

Your Employees Deserve a Thanksgiving Letter

Everyday appreciation builds a relationship beyond a paycheck, but Thanksgiving gratitude is special. Sharing **Thanksgiving Thank You notes** and gifts like a whole turkey are a workplace ritual going back generations.

"Nearly 400 years after the First Thanksgiving, gratitude is still the byword of the day. ... This is the essential meaning of Thanksgiving," writes Melanie Kirkpatrick in her book, *Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience*.

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American opportunity for all workplace leaders to share thanks. After all, we are all family on Thanksgiving. "Thanksgiving remains essentially a family holiday, but on that day, the definition of family extends to the wider community in which we live," Kirkpatrick writes.

Is your company seizing the opportunity to share in the gratitude of the season?

Whether you're handwriting a Thank You card to each member of your team, or composing a Thanksgiving message to your entire staff, be sure you're communicating your appreciation in a way that employees will remember year-round.

"People thrive on getting feedback. When people thank each other and recognize each other in a human way" — not bonuses — "retention goes up by almost 30 percent," according to Josh Bersin of Bersin by Deloitte.

Employee Thank You notes are among the top three recognition initiatives having the biggest impact on engagement, an SHRM survey found. Not only do Thank You notes fill the need for low-cost recognition, they work. Employees who are regularly recognized stay at their jobs two years longer on average, according to O.C. Tanner research.

What makes a good Thanksgiving message of gratitude?

- Recognizes the **big-picture impact** of employee work, giving specific examples.
- Tells the **success story of your company**, with employees as key players.
- Thanks employees for rising to **significant challenges**.
- Is **genuine and heartfelt**, not gushing or sentimental.
- Uses a friendly, "we're in this together" tone of **company pride**.
- **Reiterates gratitude** again with a final "Thank You."

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Don't-Miss Celebrations

THANKSGIVING (NOV. 22) — Thanksgiving is the holiday of "giving thanks" and the perfect opportunity to share your gratitude with employees. Everyone appreciates the gift of a Thanksgiving turkey to share with family and friends.

GIVING TUESDAY (NOV. 27) — Rally your team around actionable gratitude on Giving Tuesday! GivingTuesday.org offers tons of resources to help you plan workplace activities.

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

WORLD SCIENCE DAY FOR PEACE & DEVELOPMENT (Nov. 10) — Established by UNESCO in 2001, World Science Day is a celebration of science in our daily lives. The theme changes year-to-year, from astronomy to culture to green living. Highlight and celebrate the accomplishments of the scientists within your company, or take the day as an opportunity for community outreach.

WORLD KINDNESS DAY (NOV. 13) — Give employees cash or gift cards to do random acts of kindness in the community — cover lunch for someone who can't afford it, buy groceries for a homeless person, or treat the neighbor kids to ice cream. Encourage employees to be creative!

GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT (NOV. 15) — Help employees kick their cigarette habit with help from The American Cancer Society.

Holiday Turkey Gifts Put the "Thanks" in Thanksgiving!

Giving employees holiday turkeys is a longstanding tradition — according to the New York Times, historians speculate that the turkey tradition began with 19th-century English businessmen who read about (and did not want to be compared with) Ebenezer Scrooge. After all, even Scrooge bought a prize turkey for his clerk Bob Cratchit!

In the U.S., employee turkey gifts were a way to "introduce immigrants to an American tradition," New York University professor Mitchell L. Moss tells the Times. "It was a way to do holiday spirit for people who weren't familiar with the holiday."

Some companies carried on the tradition even when turkeys were in short supply. During World War II, one New York business-owner even bought and hatched turkey eggs so the company would have turkeys to distribute!

In a post about **office gift-giving**, Today columnist Laura T. Coffey writes that the gift of food is still "the sincerest demonstration of gratitude you can find."

As the holiday feast centerpiece, the **gift of a Thanksgiving turkey** is a gift of gratitude and joy that everyone appreciates.

Giving turkeys has endured as a workplace holiday tradition because it embodies the spirit of the season! A turkey represents gratitude, harvest bounty and community togetherness. It's the centerpiece to the beloved tradition of a big Thanksgiving feast, shared with family and friends.

Key Stats

Per-capita turkey consumption in the U.S. has more than doubled since 1970. The average American now eats 16 pounds of it per year. We call Thanksgiving "Turkey Day" for a reason — nearly 88 percent of Americans eat turkey on this day, consuming a total of 46 million turkeys. Turkey is also popular at Christmas (22 million) and Easter (19 million). (USDA, National Turkey Federation)



Mini-Case Study: A Thanksgiving 'Thank You' to Inspire

United States Postmaster General Pat Donahue wrote the **textbook example of a memorable Thanksgiving Thank You letter to employees**. His note is thoughtful, vivid and honors the spirit of the season. An excerpt:

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving and count our blessings, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude to you for your hard work this year. ...

You kept the mail moving through several natural disasters, including the western wildfires, the summer derecho and Hurricane Sandy. In each of these instances, you provided excellent service on the job, even while many of you were dealing with disaster-related hardships at home.

... No matter what challenge came our way — and there were many — you rose to the occasion and

reminded everyone why the Postal Service is so important to America's future.

During the next few weeks, our customers will be counting on us to deliver their holiday cards and packages. This is another opportunity for the Postal Service to grow its business — and I know we're all eager to make the most of it.

So thank you again for everything you do. I appreciate your hard work and dedication, and I wish each of you a happy and healthy Thanksgiving.



December

What Your Employees Really Want for the Holidays

It's simple, really.

Employees want your respect and genuine thanks for their contributions to your business.

Contrary to popular belief, compensation does not glue employees to your company. Employees want to know that what they do matters, according to a Corporate Executive Board study. While the holidays make us think of gift giving, what's really more important is the day-to-day engagement, empowerment, inclusion, appreciation and support that you provide.

Too many managers don't get it. A study by the International Association of Administrative Professionals and the California staffing company OfficeTeam shows managers often misunderstand promotions and cash bonuses as the most effective recognition tools. Meanwhile, surveyed workers say they prefer an in-person "Thank You" from their management.

This holiday season, give your employees what they want — your gratitude. And if budgets allow, skip the trinkets and logo wear and give employees a thoughtful, practical gift they can enjoy and even share with their family.

Consider the gift of a better future — for employees and for your organization.

Commit to building a more robust workplace culture of gratitude in the New Year:

- **Train all levels of managers in recognition**
- **Create a strategic recognition plan** that's results-based and tied to strategic business values and goals
- **Invest in employees** — training, mentoring, workplace fun, wellness
- **Commit to sharing and encouraging workplace "thanks" daily**



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Don't Miss Celebration

NATIONAL THANK YOU NOTE DAY (DEC. 26) — Celebrate by setting aside a post-holiday workday dedicated to writing customer Thank You notes! Provide the food and make it casual and fun. While you are at it, commit to a Thank You notes plan for the new year. A handwritten note is a powerful way to share gratitude with customers, clients and employees!

Ready-to-Go Celebrations

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY (DEC. 5) — Celebrate the people who give back within your organization. Visit Volunteer Action Counts for opportunities to recognize and thank volunteers.

FESTIVUS (DEC. 23) — A popular parody holiday first mentioned in a 1997 episode of "Seinfeld," Festivus is a fun alternative to the holiday season's pressures and commercialization. Like other holidays, **Festivus has traditions** — a special dinner, songs, decorations and more. Play along, or encourage employees to come up with new traditions!

NEW YEAR'S EVE (Dec. 31) — Take advantage of year-end to recap the year and highlight the new with your workplace. Make it an annual tradition to celebrate successes and remind employees why what they do is so important to the success of the company.

How to Distribute Workplace Gifts Like Santa

Santa is a superstar gift-giver and a model for distributing workplace gifts. Here are his secrets:

- **Give Gifts for the Joy of It**
No ulterior motives here! Santa just wants to make children happy and share his universal gratitude! If you share gifts out of obligation, recipients won't feel any love.
- **Don't Succumb to Stress**
Your company may be under a lot of seasonal pressure, but is it tasked with delivering personalized gifts to millions of children around the world in one night? Santa knows that stress is part of life — and no excuse to forget gratitude.
- **Give Gifts People Want (and If You Don't Know, Ask!)**
Santa doesn't guess when it comes to gifts. He travels and meets one-on-one with children to ask what they want. He reads his mail. He pays attention. Great presents don't need to cost much, but they do need to demonstrate that you understand your recipients.
- **Deliver Gifts Personally**
You might not have a reindeer sleigh at your disposal, but you should distribute workplace gifts personally, just like Santa. If company leaders are unavailable, ask direct supervisors to share gifts in person with a big smile, a handshake and a few words of appreciation.

Key Stats

Workplace gratitude affects the bottom line. A 10-year study of 200,000 employees found that in companies where few people agreed that "My organization recognizes excellence," annual return on equity averaged a paltry 2.4 percent. In contrast, companies with a culture that emphasized thanking people for excellent performance racked up returns more than three times as high!



Mini-Case Study: Throw the Holiday Party You Want

Holiday work parties go one of two ways — something the employer has to do, or wants to do, according to writer Jake Kilroy in his Entrepreneur article, "The Nicest Party I've Ever Been To: A Christmas Story."

Kilroy reflects on a Christmas party he attended years ago while working for J&M Promotions, a uniform and screen-printing company in California. It was a formal affair at an upscale restaurant. The lavish presentation, expensive dinner and generous open bar totally wowed Kilroy and his coworkers, most of whom were young and used to a casual environment.

But what stood out most to Kilroy was how much his employer wanted to throw the party.

The company owners "welcomed us like family" at the door and asked employees to write down their favorite holiday memory on a piece of paper. Later, after dessert, employees took turns reading aloud a coworker's name and favorite memory. As an employee's favorite memory was shared, the company owners invited the employee to get up and choose a wrapped present underneath the Christmas tree in the dining room, in addition to a \$50 gift card.

The J&M Promotions owners worked hard to make it a special party, and it was effective. Kilroy writes,

"I had never had such warmth and respect at a job before."



About gThankYou!® Certificates of Gratitude™

At **gThankYou**, we believe celebrating employees and customers is good business. That's why we provide company leaders with a variety of easy, meaningful and affordable ways to recognize and reward employees, customers and clients, holiday-time or anytime.

gThankYou! Turkey Gift Certificates and **Turkey Or Ham Gift Certificates** are two of America's favorite employee gifts for the holidays and can be redeemed for any brand (Turkey or Turkey Or Ham), any preparation, at virtually any grocery store in the U.S.

All gThankYou Certificates of Gratitude come with **free custom Enclosure Cards**, which include your choice of design, your message and your company logo (if you wish). Check out our **Thanksgiving** and **Winter Holiday** design catalogs – we have dozens of designs from which to select. And, nearly all orders ship the day they are received.

We also offer **free cookbooks to download and share** – the Ultimate Thanksgiving Turkey Guide and the Holiday Ham Guide. Both are perfect companions to go with your thoughtful gift of a gThankYou! Turkey, Ham or Grocery Gift Certificate.

To learn more about gThankYou! Certificates of Gratitude:

- Visit Our Website – www.gThankYou.com.
- Watch Our **"About Us" Video** featuring Company Founder Rick Kiley.
- Download Our **Free Product Guide**.
- See Our Collection of **Free Enclosure Cards** available with all purchases.
- Follow **"Celebrating Work"** – Our Company Blog.
- Join the Conversation! [@gThankYou](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Google+](#).

gThankYou, LLC is located in Madison, Wisconsin

Contact: Rick Kiley, Chief ThankYou! Officer

info@gThankYou.com

Call Toll-Free at 888-484-1658

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7 Tips to Writing Great Employee Thank-you Notes

The best thank-you notes are...

- 1. Handwritten.** In the digital age, a handwritten note stands out. It creates a document of gratitude worth saving, pinning to the wall or memorializing in a photo album.
- 2. Heartfelt.** Try writing as you would speak. Don't shy away from opening up and sharing your feelings. It's important to be genuine. It won't take away from the overall professional, grateful tone.
- 3. Personal.** Establish the bond you feel with the recipient. It takes all kinds to run a successful business, so honor and celebrate everyone's distinctive personality.
- 4. Specific.** Even three sentences is fine, as long as you explain specifically why you're grateful and include a positive send-off that has an eye toward the future ("I look forward to seeing you work your magic on the next project!").
- 5. Timely.** Don't save up your gratitude for a once-a-year blowout. Your "thank you" has the most impact right away.

- 6. Delivered in Person.** If possible, deliver your letter with a handshake, big smile and "Thank you!"
- 7. A Habit!** Gratitude is like a muscle that needs flexing to grow. Make note-writing a regular part of your workweek and it'll get easier and faster with time. Be a role model and train others to do the same. Watch what happens — gratitude is contagious!



Our Mission

gThankYou is dedicated to helping organizations celebrate and say "thank you" to valued employees, customers and clients – holiday time or anytime.

We believe happy workplaces are successful workplaces. Research shows sharing gratitude in the workplace builds overall health, happiness, community and increased productivity and profits. That's why we're committed to helping company leaders build vibrant cultures of engagement and gratitude. We offer gThankYou! Certificates of Gratitude in a range of varieties and price points to fit most workplace needs and budgets.

gThankYou is dedicated to sharing its message of workplace gratitude by offering free resources and a blog full of best-practice thinking. "Celebrating Work" publishes insights, inspiration and up-to-date thinking about building great workplace cultures. We welcome you to download, subscribe, share and join the conversation!

Share your "thank you" today and you'll not only make colleagues feel valued and loyal, you'll inspire a chain of gratitude in your workplace that can develop into a superior workforce, more profits and more fun. Why wait?