



# Day-to-Day Employee Celebration Calendar

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

2019

## Make 2019 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 most recent “State of the American Workplace” report, released in 2017, 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in crisis mode, and change isn’t optional, the researchers concluded: “The old ways — annual reviews, forced rankings, outdated competencies — no longer achieve the intended results.”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 annually on employee recognition goes toward ineffective tenure-based recognition such as pins and

awards dinners. The spirit of these efforts is admirable, 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. **Further, researchers have identified the important difference between recognition and appreciation.** In short: **Recognition** primarily focuses on what the company wants, and can come off as manipulative and insincere. **Appreciation** acknowledges workers as human beings and motivates them to care because their managers do.

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 and appreciation don’t cost more. They’re 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's Recognition Needs

Your organization is unique. So are your recognition needs. Begin planning by asking these six key questions to assess those 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
Bigger budget	Less flexibility to tailor program locally



## Ready for Takeoff!

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 capability of every human being.

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 let you create a unique, effective employee engagement program that fits your organization.

# January

## Train Your Managers in the Art of Thanking Employees

Truly effective employee appreciation goes beyond simply thanking your staff at the annual office party. It's a learned skill. The best appreciation combines:

- Clear, mission-driven communication
- Smart analytics
- Year-round development
- Strategic gifts and praise

Training managers in employee appreciation isn't just good for retention and productivity. **It's good for managers, and shows the company is willing to invest in their development.**

Here are points to remember when training managers in the art of employee appreciation:

**Leaders set the tone for workplace culture.** Senior leadership needs to model the behavior they expect managers to deploy, and provide the tools and training to be successful.

**True appreciation isn't one-size-fits-all.** "Not all employees respond to the same type of recognition and praise," Dr. Sherlene McHenry writes for Nursery Management. Some prefer gifts or words of affirmation, while others respond better to quality time or a friendly fist bump.

**Timing matters.** Reinforce employees' desire to contribute by saying thanks right away. Schedule "recognition moments" like performance reviews, but show appreciation organically, as well.

**Be specific.** Tell the employee exactly what they've done to earn your thanks and why it contributes to the company's success.

**The personal touch is essential.** Managers should deliver thanks face-to-face whenever possible, with a handshake and a big smile. Handwritten notes stand out, too. Provide stationery to make writing Thank You notes easy.

Managers who know when and how to show appreciation build a culture of gratitude that attracts employees. And because gratitude naturally spreads, training managers in it is one of the most sustainable investments you can make.

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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. 9)** — 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!

## Build a Kinder, More Human Workplace

In today's technology-heavy workplaces, **it's good business to encourage positive, face-to-face human interaction.** Forbes contributor Dan Schwabel **notes** deliberate efforts at Apple, Google, and IBM to get workers into the same physical space together.

*"Companies will continue to promote their workspaces and design them to facilitate interpersonal relationships between employees," he writes. "Leaders who encourage personal connections will have more committed, satisfied, and productive workers."*

Not every business can afford to build Google Cafes, of course. But managers can adopt a mind-set to promote stronger connections among their employees. A Harvard Business Review article titled **"Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings?"** contends that true leadership comes from "our abilities to form personal and meaningful bonds with the people whom we lead."

**The HBR authors offer four pieces of advice for leaders who want to be more effective:**

- 1. Be personal.** Put yourself in employees' shoes and imagine they are family members or friends.
- 2. Be self-aware.** When you understand yourself, you are better able to understand and empathize with the people you lead, and in turn lead for their intrinsic motivation.
- 3. Be selfless.** Leadership is not about you, but about the people and the organization you lead.
- 4. Be compassionate.** When it comes to leadership, nothing beats compassion. It is a universal language that is understood by everyone, everywhere. Make a habit of asking one simple question whenever you engage with anyone: **How can I help this person have a better day?**

## 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

Nearly 50 percent of all workers say they would leave their job for a company that was better at recognizing employees. (Globoforce)

# February

## Creating a Culture of Appreciation With Art

Gapingvoid Culture Design Group uses art and design to help businesses communicate their corporate cultures. One way the company often helps clients is by creating a “culture wall” — literally a wall in the office covered in art that articulates what the business’s values are.

As Benjamin P. Hardy puts it in a post on Inc., “The wall aligns your people’s mind-set to the mission of the company by reminding them of the purpose behind their work, and why they do what they do.” It’s common to hear both employees and clients mentioning a company’s values and beliefs, thanks to its culture wall, he adds.

You don’t need to commission expensive custom art to make a difference in your workplace. Writing for Forbes, Karen Higginbottom notes that just giving employees some control over how the office looks can increase productivity by as much as 32 percent.

Other research shows that just having art in the workplace helps reduce stress and improves employees’ well-being. And Forbes contributor Victor Lipman points to the ROE generated by art — “return on environment.”

“It shows management cares enough about the employee experience — and the customer experience — to have a thoughtfully maintained facility that people feel good about working in,” he writes.

We hired Gapingvoid to create some pieces for us in celebration of gThankYou’s 10th anniversary, and employees and customers have loved them! If your budget is limited, there are low-cost ways of incorporating art into your work, and that’s the kind of gesture — especially if you involve employees — that can help cement a culture of appreciation. “Pay attention to the emotions you’re expressing to employees every day. Your mood creates a cultural blueprint for the group.”



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## Don’t-Miss Celebration

**RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY (FEB. 17)** — The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has plenty of ideas at [randomactsofkindness.org](http://randomactsofkindness.org) for building goodwill at work and in the community. Make a week of it: RAK Week is Feb. 17-23. Participate on social media with the hashtag #RAKweek2019. You can even nominate an employee or coworker as a “RAKtivist” and publicly recognize them for their kindness.

## Ready-to-Go Celebrations

**SUPER BOWL MONDAY (FEB. 4)** — The game and halftime 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.

**PRESIDENTS’ DAY (FEB. 18)** — Take this opportunity to reflect on the qualities that define truly great leaders. Countless inspirational quotes from U.S. commanders-in-chief are just a web search away and easy to share with your team — like this one, courtesy of Harry S. Truman: “It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

## 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 performing 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 Madison observed alterations in brain function in study participants after just seven hours of compassion training — a “remarkable” turnaround, he said.

## Key Stats

82 percent of employees think they are not recognized for their work as often as they deserve to be. (Bamboo HR)



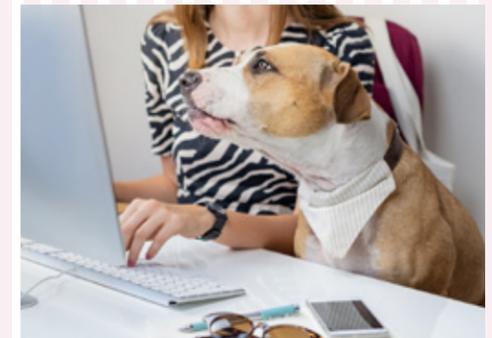
## Mini Case Study: Why Send Flowers? Send a Snuggle Instead!

Monroe County Humane Association in Indiana raises money through its “Send a Snuggle Day” for Random Acts of Kindness Week. For the annual event, which began in 2014, the public can donate money to send “animal ambassadors” to spread a little cheer and kindness to a person or team of their choosing.

The snuggly emissaries have included dogs, kittens, rabbits, goats, a miniature horse, and an albino snake. (No one ever sends the snake, MCHA executive director Rebecca Warren notes.) Volunteers accompany the animals into banks, schools, and other workplaces.

Warren told the Indiana Daily Student that when Send a Snuggle visits a workplace, it’s usually not just one person who reaps the benefits.

“It becomes an entire facility response. Everyone is so excited when they see the animal. Everyone’s taking pictures and getting down on the floor. At least three people cry,” Warren said. “Send a Snuggle is the best day of the year to do my job. It’s wonderful to see people get so excited and emotional about it.”



# 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 (celebrated in last year's acclaimed documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*). March 20 is Mister Rogers Day, a perfect opportunity to practice the gentleness, patience, and kindness indelibly associated with him.

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 goose bumps 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 1)** — 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," business consultant Francis Cholle says.

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 five-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 Origin of the Golden Banana Award

At HP Inc. (still better known to many as Hewlett-Packard), the "Golden Banana Award" is one of the highest and most prestigious honors an employee can receive. As its funny name suggests, there's a story behind the award.

A company engineer burst into his manager's office to share some exciting news: He'd just solved a problem that his group had struggled with for weeks on end. "I did it!" he announced.

Equally thrilled, the manager scanned his desk to find a suitable reward for this wonderful achievement. All he had was a banana left over from his lunch. Undeterred, he presented it to the engineer regardless, saying, "Well done — congratulations!"

The prize's first iteration may have been perishable, but the moment became an immortal piece of HP's history. And since then, Golden Banana Awards have been bestowed on any number of innovative employees. So while it may sound a bit silly, one manager's heartfelt desire to demonstrate his gratitude helped foster a lasting culture of appreciation throughout his company.



# 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 24)** — 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

**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: 2018's theme was "Health for All." Check out the 2019 theme and **find promotional ideas and materials here**.

**EASTER (APRIL 21)** — 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.

**EARTH DAY (APRIL 22) AND ARBOR DAY** — Get to work for a healthier planet! National Arbor Day is always the last Friday of the month, but celebrations can vary by regional growing season, so check **arborday.org** to find opportunities for your team to get involved in tree-planting activities.

## Everyday Thank You Ideas

It's important to share thanks daily — not just on holidays or at the annual company picnic. Sustaining gratitude is like tending a garden, so think of these fun activities as extra water to keep the soil rich!

**Try Thank-You Note Thursdays.** Try letter-writing as a regular group activity, between coworkers or from employees to customers or vendors. Spending a few minutes each week to express gratitude can help strengthen vital relationships. Bring in a low-cost treat like bagels and juice to get everyone jazzed to meet.

**Start a gratitude board.** Put up a bulletin board or create a space online where employees can easily thank or commend each other and share appreciation for your company's achievements.

**Offer flex time or time off.** Employees consistently name time off or a flexible schedule as a perk that means a lot to them. Giving someone the afternoon off when they've completed a major task or letting them come in late signals that you value the high quality of their work more than just the quantity of hours they spend at the office.

**Throw a surprise appreciation party.** If your team has been working hard and deserves a break, surprise them by ending the workday earlier than usual and breaking out the food, drink, and even a few party favors. Pro tip: Schedule it as a meeting in their calendars ahead of time to reduce the chances that someone needs to take a call or go out to see a client.

## 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

## Resources for Building an Employee Wellness Program

Per [HR Dive](#), in a 2017 study by Virgin Pulse, 85 percent of employers surveyed said their employee wellness programs were good for **employee engagement**, recruitment, retention, and overall company culture. **More than just offering exercise- and diet-related options, these programs are increasingly incorporating mental-health components as well.**

Sharlyn Lauby at [HR Bartender](#) advocates a more holistic definition of wellness, one that encompasses five types of well-being determined through [intensive research by Gallup](#):

- **Career:** how you occupy your time and if you like what you do every day
- **Social:** having strong relationships and love in your life
- **Financial:** effectively managing your economic life
- **Physical:** having good health and enough energy
- **Community:** the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live

The Gallup researchers note that **the greatest threat to our well-being is ourselves**, because our short-term desires typically take precedence over longer-term objectives. An effective wellness program will incorporate short-term incentives that motivate employees to make the healthy choices that help in the long run.

A 2016 Harvard Business Review article, [“How to Design a Corporate Wellness Plan That Actually Works,”](#) explains that **financial incentives usually don’t work**, but that immediate, more internal incentives — like feeling good after a yoga session — can succeed.

Offering employees opportunities to **form workplace friendships** — or at least **stronger connections** — can work, too. Take the broader view of wellness and incorporate the five key essential areas of well-being. However you approach your plan, building a wellness program that employees are excited about is a fantastic way to show them some genuine appreciation.

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### Don’t-Miss Celebration

**WORLD LAUGHTER DAY (MAY 5)** — 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 7)** — Thank the people at your company who make workplace learning and mentoring happen! Teacher Appreciation Day is part of Teacher Appreciation Week, May 6-10.

**NATIONAL RECEPTIONIST DAY (MAY 8)** — 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 21)** — 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 27)** — 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.

## Tips to Maximize Employee Recognition Time

In an [HR Bartender survey](#), one in five employees said the chief reason they’d leave their job was to find a more supportive manager. So it’s worth reflecting on these tips for being more mindfully present when recognizing their contributions:

1. **Put away your smartphone.** [HR Dive explored](#) the impact of bosses taking calls and checking their phones while meeting with employees — and, no surprise, employees dislike it. Three quarters said it led to lack of trust and decreased engagement. Bottom line, it’s disrespectful and can increase stress.
2. **Share a little compassion.** [A Harvard Business Review](#) article examined how power neurologically impairs our ability to understand others. To address that, try applying compassion to interactions with employees and others (ask yourself, “How can I be of benefit to this person?”); seeking opportunities to show compassion; and practicing a daily compassion meditation (there’s an example in the article).
3. **Just be nice.** Here’s the “big secret to employee engagement,” per an [HR Dive article](#): Be nice. It’s also an effective way to get people to work more efficiently, motivate a team, and change your corporate culture. As author Cord Himelstein puts it, everyone “will work harder for someone who is nice to them and work less hard for someone who is mean to them.”

### Key Stats

Research shows customer satisfaction was 14 percent higher in organizations with high employee engagement. (Bersin by Deloitte)



## Mini Case Study: Employee Recognition Improves Outcomes

Ohio Living’s 3,000 employees serve over 70,000 senior citizens’ healthcare needs each year. Originally, the organization viewed employee recognition as a way to reduce turnover in a competitive market. Then research showed a gap: **“The number one thing employees want is appreciation for work accomplished, but managers thought it was the eighth-highest priority.”** That inspired chief HR and ethics officer Dana Ullom-Vucelich to [spearhead a new approach](#).

Employee ratings are tied 100 percent to core company values. Managers are onboarded through a program that includes **sessions on employee appreciation, run not by HR personnel, but by workers and managers who apply Ohio Living’s recognition practices in their daily jobs.** That ensures everyone is invested in best practices.

This approach has had a significant impact on employees and patients. Employees at high-recognition sites have higher satisfaction (75% vs. 62%) and lower turnover (39% vs. 62%).

Patient satisfaction at these sites is higher too (93% vs. 87%). **That difference represents almost 5,000 patients per year — a significant number in an industry driven by customer referrals.** Patients also experience fewer falls (12% vs. 24%), emergency department visits, and hospital readmissions — thus improving outcomes by better caring for staff.



# June

## Being a Good Citizen Is Good for Business

Harvard Business Review **reported on** the beneficial effects when employees engage in “citizenship behaviors” — that is: “helping out coworkers, volunteering to take on special assignments, introducing new ideas and work practices, attending non-mandatory meetings, putting in extra hours to complete important projects, and so forth.”

**Employees who voluntarily demonstrate citizenship behaviors tend to find their work more meaningful and improve performance.**

**They also want to make a difference outside of work.** 74 percent say their job is more fulfilling when provided with opportunities to make a positive impact on social and environmental issues. Corporate responsibility (CR) is also a significant consideration for job candidates — **in one survey, half the respondents said they wouldn’t work for a company that didn’t have strong social or environmental commitments.**

**So how do you encourage being a good citizen, both at your company and outside of it?**

**Management should be clear about the kinds of citizenship behaviors that line up with the company’s needs and values.** And employers should ask employees to be honest about the expressions of citizenship they’re most comfortable with. Take this example from HBR:

*An introverted engineer who dreads socializing but does not mind pulling the occasional all-nighter might feel less obligated to take part in every social event, knowing that she can be the one to take charge when someone has to stay late to complete a critical project.*

To truly make it possible to give back, you should also offer the time and financial support to do it. But most importantly, whether you’re encouraging citizenship behaviors at work or elsewhere, **you need to ensure employees are performing these acts because they want to.** As long as they’re not already stretched too thin, employees want opportunities to excel in ways that are meaningful to them.

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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 7)** — 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 21)** — Check with your local United Way chapter for activities happening around this time. 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...).

## Say Something Nice Today!

According to Inc., a Gallup study found that “employees who receive praise on a regular basis increase their individual productivity, receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers, and are more likely to stay with their organization.”

In this case, “on a regular basis” means once per week. With so many compliments to give, how do you do it well?

1. **Before you speak, ask yourself why.** You’ll land on a better, more specific compliment this way. **These suggestions may get you in the right frame of mind.**
2. **Don’t fake it.** Give compliments you really believe are true — they only work if you’re sincere.
3. **Acknowledge the person’s efforts beyond their skills.** What did it take for them to perform so well? What obstacles did they overcome?
4. **Describe the impact.** People love to hear how their efforts positively affect others.
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: Build Workplace Kindness With a Smile Day

**National Smile Power Day is June 15**, but every day is the perfect day to fuel workplace kindness! **Studies have revealed** how smiling more can transform us.

But why? Our brains notice smiles, which disrupt negative thought patterns. **If you smile often enough, you rewire your brain to make more positive patterns.**

Here are some fun ways to encourage smiling and inspire workplace kindness:

- Snap photos of employees smiling and display the pics in the office (as in the accompanying photo from [Smile.oi](#))
- Have a “Smile” contest — and celebrate everyone as winners with gift certificates for a treat (gThankYou’s **Pie** or **Candy** Gift Certificates are a great option)

- Hang a poster or whiteboard that reads “What makes me smile...” and have staff fill in the blank with words or pictures

*The Happiness Advantage* author Shawn Achor says we can practice beneficial positive thinking. But it’s not automatic. As he notes:

“Happiness is a work ethic. ... It’s something that requires our brains to train just like an athlete has to train.” Start practicing now with a smile!



# July

## Civility in the Workplace: More Than Just 'Being Nice'

Rudeness might not sound like a major problem in the workplace. But Science Daily recently described workplace incivility as **"the silent epidemic,"** and a **Wall Street Journal** article delved into how it impacts productivity.

**"Witnessing rudeness in the morning can hurt a person's job performance all day"** and diminish their ability to do their best work over a longer term, said the article, based on research from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

So what can you do about it?

Christine Porath is the author of **Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace**. She described how **civility is more than an absence of rudeness:**

**"Not being rude is about being neutral. And what I'm hoping people will do is be civil in the sense of positive gestures — being respectful, showing dignity, being courteous and being kind in ways that lift other people up. ... It's about going beyond neutral and affirming mutual respect and decency and helping others around you."**

Porath notes that employees who aren't civil are frequently modeling leaders' behavior. She advises:

**"If you really want to connect with your employees or team, you should focus on leading with warmth.** Most people are in a hurry to prove their competence, but warmth actually contributes significantly more to people's valuations."

The fastest way to increase civility in the workplace may simply be saying "Thank You." As a **blog post** from the Wallace Centers of Iowa says: **"When we are thankful, we take time to appreciate the value of others and we see the world as bigger than ourselves."**

Say Thank You and start setting an example today!



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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 21)** — 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. (Make sure to get a nondairy option for vegan and lactose-intolerant)

## Successful Onboarding 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/Globoforce)

## 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, a "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: Peer Recognition Helps JetBlue Soar

Research from **Globoforce** found that **41 percent of companies that use peer-to-peer recognition have improved in customer satisfaction.** And JetBlue — named number one in customer satisfaction among low-cost air carriers for 11 years — bears that out.

At JetBlue, employees can nominate coworkers for everyday contributions and noteworthy achievements. The company shares these "success stories" internally, and nominees get points they can use at restaurants or for travel or other things.

**Because the recipient chooses the reward, it's more relevant and meaningful.** Plus, unlike a raise, the on-the-spot bonus method avoids setting new mental anchors for the compensation level an employee feels happy earning.

After this program was launched, engaged crew members were three times more likely to "wow" their customers and twice as likely to be in the top 10 percent of customer compliments. **And for every 10 percent increase in people being recognized, JetBlue saw a 3 percent increase in retention and a 2 percent increase in engagement.**

# August

## Keeping Employees Engaged in the Summer

No question — people look forward to summer's more leisurely pace. But that can also mean employers face decreased productivity. In fact, **according to research cited in Entrepreneur, "workplace productivity drops 20 percent during the summer months.** Projects take 13 percent longer to complete and workers are 45 percent more distracted."

Common summer distractions include:

- Vacations (taking, planning, and recovering from them)
- Kids (with school out, child care needs and schedules require adjustment)
- The great outdoors (in many places, summer is the only time to really enjoy being outside)

It's a challenge to keep employees engaged in the face of these and other considerations. Here are a few ideas that might help.

**Offer flexible schedules.** Brigham Young University research says workers with flexible hours "tend to work more intensely" than employees with rigid schedules, because they're grateful for the autonomy and want to keep the privilege.

**Institute "summer Fridays."** In some industries, it's common to leave early during the summer on Fridays. Employees are often already antsy and just waiting out the clock — if their critical work is done, you can score big points by not pointlessly chaining them to their desks.

**Get outside.** Picnic tables can be used for lunch, breaks, meetings, or just working in the sunshine — keeping spirits up!

**Offer learning opportunities.** If summer is slow, it's a perfect time to hold training or educational sessions and break up employees' regular routine.

**Salary.com** and **Integrity HR** have more suggestions. (Trainer Mike Kerr **has some humorous ones**, too.) Just remember: **Summer slowness is a challenge — but also an opportunity to show employees how much you value them!**

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## Don't-Miss Celebration

**Friendship Day (AUG. 4)** — 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."

## Don't Just Recognize Employees – Appreciate Them!

**There's a difference between recognition and appreciation** — and it matters, **notes consultant and author Paul White.** He says he's seen too many employee recognition programs that end up getting negative reactions from workers, because they don't involve authentic appreciation.

Recognition is largely about behavior and improving performance, and it usually happens in only one direction — from the top down. **It can feel impersonal or contrived, rather than genuine.**

On the other hand, **appreciation can't be faked.** It must be sincere and grounded in the personal relationship between two people — often supervisor and employee, but not always, since appreciation can be expressed in any direction, including from coworker to coworker and from employee to manager.

As Dr. Gary Chapman, author of **The Five Love Languages** series, explains: Appreciation is especially important for employees who don't always perform highly enough for formal recognition:

*They may not be performing at their peak, for many reasons, but when you express interest in them as a person, they are motivated to become more involved. **It is the difference between treating people as machines who crank out the work and people who have feelings, frustrations, desires, and dreams.** When people feel appreciated, they want to be a part of the team.*

**Both recognition and appreciation can be powerful motivators.** But only when leaders understand the difference.



## 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: Plan a 'Hooky Day'

Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, has a quirky tradition that could be adapted for employee engagement.

Every spring the college hosts its famous "Flunk Day," when classes are canceled and campus becomes a carnival, with games, rides, food, and music. **Nobody knows for sure when it's happening, but everyone looks forward to it.**

Flunk Day is a Knox tradition that dates to the 1920s, and student-organized spring festivals on the Knox campus go back to the beginning of the 20th century. Planners of each year's Flunk Day keep its exact date a closely guarded secret, resulting in weeks of rumors as everyone awaits the big day.

Intrigued? **Consider announcing that your workplace will hold a "play hooky" day during the spring or summer.** Then plan a day full of team-building fun and give everyone an exciting surprise to look forward to!



# September

## Engaging Remote Workers: What's New

One estimate from 2018 says that 3.9 million Americans now work from home at least half the week, or almost 3 percent of the country's workforce. While that flexibility can be ideal for both employee and employer, remote workers need to be kept in the loop and made to feel they're part of the team.

When you're hiring, be aware that **remote workers must be capable communicators**, since their words and voices will be standing in for their physical presence. They'll need to be comfortable with technology, too — email, IMs, videoconferencing, and programs like Dropbox are by and large how they'll stay connected to their peers in the office.

And once a remote worker has been hired, ensure they have a full onboarding process. **There's value in bringing in a new hire for a tour of your facilities**, even if they'll work remotely thereafter. Or consider offering a virtual tour of your space, using videoconferencing technology.

Kevin Eikenberry, co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute, told SHRM he:

*"asks new virtual team members to initiate 15- to 30-minute get-to-know-you phone conversations with each existing team member (who has been notified to expect that call). The calls foster collaboration and take some of the pressure off the manager to be the primary contact person."*

**Be conscientious about passing along information from on-site meetings when remote workers can't attend.**

Remember: On-site employees are not more important or otherwise "better" than remote employees. Engaging remote workers means not forgetting them for opportunities or advancement, and finding ways to recognize them when they're not at office events. As one expert told SHRM: **"Everyone needs to have the same opportunities. We want to recognize and reward everyone equally."**

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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. 2)** — 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. 8-14)** — Appreciation is missing for many of today's truck drivers. The prospect of automation in the industry is making truckers feel undervalued, underappreciated, 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.

## The Key to Workplace Happiness Is Gratitude

A key element of happiness in the workplace — and everywhere else — is **gratitude**. As researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky explains in this short video, gratitude paves the way in several ways.

**Gratitude helps us savor positive experiences.** As researcher Dr. Emiliana Simon-Thomas told Fast Company, when challenges arise, people who've paid attention to their positive experiences are better able to "realize creative solutions to those setbacks" since they've taken time to notice when good things do happen.

**Gratitude leads us to be more helpful.** The founder of digital wellness company Happier is straightforward in Time: "Helping others makes you happier. And helping your colleagues makes you happier at work." **When we're grateful, we're more likely to step up and lend a hand.**

**Gratitude neutralizes negative emotion.** As Lyubomirsky says: "It's almost impossible to feel grateful and at the same time feel greedy or envious or bitter or anxious."

It's not difficult to practice gratitude! In a study described by Lyubomirsky, a group that updated a "gratitude journal" once per week — just writing down five things they were thankful for — reported a measurable rise in happiness. For much less outlay than a therapy session or even an hour of exercise, the participants saw a generous return.

### 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: Create 'Productive Generosity' with a Reciprocity Ring

We're taught that competition is at the heart of business success. But it turns out, **being extra generous can be good for your company** too.

In the "Reciprocity Ring" exercise run by Give and Take author Adam Grant, one participant tells the others about something they need. The other participants offer skills, connections, and other resources to help.

Grant has run Reciprocity Ring sessions with leaders at major multinational corporations like IBM, Citigroup, UPS, and Boeing. And the point isn't just to get people to be nicer to each others:

Thirty people in a consulting firm estimated savings exceeding \$250,000 and fifty days. Fifteen people

in a global pharmaceutical firm estimating savings of more than \$90,000 and sixty-seven days.

The other major feature of the Reciprocity Ring: It turns people who tend to be "takers" into "givers." This discovery led Grant and others to create a software platform called **Givitas**, designed to make it easier for workers to ask for and receive help. Ultimately, the hope is to dramatically shift corporate cultures and promote **"productive generosity."**

Smart companies will recognize the power of giving and take steps to facilitate it among workers. As Grant notes, **in a giving culture, "problems become more tractable, and groups become more successful."**

# October

## Cultivating Workplace Friendships Is Smart

Gallup Q-12's employee engagement research finds having a best friend in the workplace correlates with higher job satisfaction AND improved retention.

### Why Companies Should Help

When employee recognition company **O.C. Tanner** tested the concept that having a best friend at work is important, it learned that:

- 75 percent of employees with best friends at work indicated they "feel they're able to take anything on," compared with 58 percent who didn't have a best friend at work
- 72 percent of employees with best friends at work were satisfied with their jobs, compared with 54 percent who didn't have a best friend at work and weren't satisfied with their work

### How Companies Can Help

Your office won't have as many Ping Pong, foosball, and pool tables as Google and Facebook, but you can still encourage colleagues to become friends through fun workplace interactions (perhaps a Halloween party this month?). **Gary Beckstrand of O.C. Tanner suggests:**

- Schedule enjoyable "offsites" to give employees an opportunity to come together in a non-work setting.
- Ensure that employees aren't chained to their desks all day, focused on their computers vs. real-life interactions.
- Plan team lunches or social breaks.
- Allow social time when meetings or conference calls begin.
- Don't be overly sensitive to time spent "around the water cooler" or breakroom chats.
- Be friendly — projecting this demeanor encourages social interactions and nurtures an environment where friendships can thrive.

Want more tips? Check out this article in **Tiny Pulse on fostering workplace friendships**.

### Gratitude Helps

**Greater Good research** shows that gratitude helps us to "initiate, maintain, and strengthen our relationships" and causes us to be **more helpful to coworkers**.

*Who doesn't want more of that in the workplace?*

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## Don't-Miss Celebration

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY (OCT. 26)** — **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 same kind of recognition you want them to 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!

## The Power of Shared Experiences in the Workplace

Shared experiences among coworkers are instrumental to building effective teams. **As HR Dive explains:**

**"Employees benefit from having a common experience during the learning process.** This social interaction helps individuals digest new concepts and gives them an opportunity to learn from each other."

Activities like team dinners, intense workout classes, improv classes, and volunteer events can help workers learn about each other's personalities while also breaking down awkwardness.

**An engaged team understands each other's strengths and weaknesses and can problem-solve more effectively.**

On the flip side, shared experiences that are high-stress with little meaning like hazing are negative, not appropriate, and should be avoided.

### Making Memories

Augusto Giacomani's **article exploring the importance of shared experiences** cites a 2016 Yale study; in it, he explains:

**"Managers should realize that it's not enough simply to offer or host an event.** Once the shared experience has occurred, they should tell meaningful narratives about the experience." Remind team members about the event by sharing stories from it or writing about it in a newsletter or on social media.

Giacomani says, "Recalling the event will spark greater bonding among team members, which will lead to increased emotional intelligence and improved performance."

## Key Stats

80 percent of executives realize how important the employee experience is, but only 22 percent believe their organizations deliver a validating, respectful environment. (Deloitte)



## 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 says.

# 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," says 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.

### 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. 28)** — 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.

## 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 perform 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. 21)** — Though smoking is on the decrease, tobacco use is still the leading preventable cause of death worldwide. Help employees kick their cigarette habit with help from the American Cancer Society. Support can make all the difference.

## Holiday Turkey Gifts Put the 'Thanks' in Thanksgiving!

Giving employees holiday turkeys is a long-standing 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 to) 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 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 token 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 — and appreciation.**
- **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

**GIVING TUESDAY (DEC. 3)** — Rally your team around actionable gratitude on Giving Tuesday! [GivingTuesday.org](http://GivingTuesday.org) offers tons of resources to help you plan workplace activities.

**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 the 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 — they're something the employer has to do, or something they want 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](http://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

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[info@gThankYou.com](mailto: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?