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Rewarding Employees Gets Personal

by [Nicole Fallon](#), Business News Daily Assistant Editor | December 15, 2014 11:33am ET



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Employee recognition has long been a staple of workplace culture. Whether it's an "employee of the month" award, a prize for making the most sales or dinner out on the company's dime for reaching a huge goal, rewarding your workers for their efforts can go a long way to boosting team morale and job satisfaction.

While all employee groups want to be acknowledged for their contributions, different generations of workers may **not all want the same** thing when it

comes to specific recognition and reward tactics. Some employers have realized this, but others have been a little slower to catch on.

"The principles of effective recognition have not changed, [but] tactics or execution around principles must continually evolve and adapt to remain meaningful and effective," said Gary Beckstrand, vice president of marketing at employee recognition solutions provider **O.C. Tanner**. "Recognition initiatives are often a lower priority compared to other change initiatives within an organization, so change is slower. Once companies see the value of recognition on productivity and great work, change can happen quickly."

Beckstrand noted that highly personalized recognition efforts are especially likely to resonate with millennial employees. Gen Y workers appreciate informal but public recognition that point out their specific contributions, rather than the general outcomes of group projects and objectives, he said. Catering to this desire will help to create the type of environment that millennials look for in a job, and therefore boost your retention rates. **[What Millennials Want from Their Employers]**

"Culture trumps compensation," said BeauHale, co-founder of ad technology firm **AdBoom Group**. "Millennials care more about the environment that they work in than being paid big bucks. [They are] less likely to look for jobs that provide security, and would rather choose those that make them feel a sense of happiness and fulfillment."

No matter what the age demographics of your workforce look like, it's important to remind employees on a regular basis how much the company values them by celebrating important individual milestones, such as work anniversaries, and sharing that with the company.

"Celebrate an employee's loyalty and tenure at regular intervals — 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, etc. —and make the recognition as personal as possible to that specific employee," Beckstrand told Business News Daily. The emotion and psychology of every work anniversary is different. Throw away the cookie-cutter recognition and tailor your efforts to the individual and where they are in their career and potentially, in their life."

"Be creative and relevant to your company culture with celebrations, and be sure to publicly recognize in ways that will resonate with your employees," added Cheryl Kerrigan, vice president of employee success at employee recognition tool **Achievers**. "When you make recognition visible and public it can be celebrated and appreciated by the entire company."

Here are a few examples of unique, effective ways that employers are recognizing and rewarding their staff.

Giving extra time off as a reward. At talent management firm **Caliper**, employees really appreciate time off, said director of human resources Trish O'Brien. The company also wants its employees to remain healthy and fulfilled in their personal lives. Therefore, employees are given paid time off for having an annual physical exam. Winners of company initiatives like charitable-giving contests also win an extra vacation day.

Sending them on a trip. What employee wouldn't love the thought of an all-expenses-paid, week-long vacation? Restaurant franchises **Checkers** and **Tokyo Joe's** do just that for their corporate employees. Checkers sends its top sales reps on a cruise, while Tokyo Joe's founder Larry Leith brings the company's general managers to his vacation home in Maui, called "House of Joe's."

Letting them play games at work. Gamification has become a popular strategy for driving customer engagement, but it works just as well when you're trying to motivate staff members, too. Employee incentive platform **Snowfly** gives workers "game tokens" as a reward for productive behavior, which can be redeemed instantly to play online casino-style chance games. The points earned from the games can be converted to cash on a prepaid Visa card.

Helping employees achieve personal goals. Achievers asks its employees to set a "Personal Top 1," a meaningful goal that drives them to improve their personal or professional lives. This goal can be anything from running their first marathon to learning how to code. The company offers a subsidy to anyone who completes the goal in the allotted time frame and holds public celebrations to recognize the employee's achievement.