THE POWER OF EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

How to Make Recognition a Core Part of Business Strategy
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Welcome to Employee Appreciation Month

Businesses are comprised of a variety of capital, with human capital being the most critical to sustainability and success.

The minds that drive innovation, the behaviors that build culture, and the personalities that forge relationships are all components of human capital. Employee Appreciation Month (or day, week, year; however your organization chooses to celebrate it!) provides companies with an occasion to be hyper-focused on their employees and express their gratitude in a public manner.

In today’s employee-centric world, where workers have many choices of where to lend their talents, it is important to reaffirm their decision to work for you. Remember: Employee appreciation is more than a day or week—it’s a long-term investment your employees and your company’s bottom line.

Appreciation and Your Bottom Line

Unlike other company holidays and celebrations, Employee Appreciation Month is uniquely tied to a fundamental business interest: to ensure the people responsible for the current and future success of your business are engaged and set up for success.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when planning for it:

- Managers account for $70\%$¹ of the variance in employee engagement, with recognition playing a huge role
- Ninety-three percent of employees² want to be recognized quarterly, if not more frequently
- Only 41% of employees³ are recognized at their preferred frequency

Today more than ever, the everyday employee experience is a key driver of engagement, productivity, and overall business growth. Employee Appreciation Month is a fantastic stepping stone for building on-going recognition culture at your organization. It’s also a great opportunity to test out which engagement tactics are best for your unique employee base, since it varies with every organization.

Employee Appreciation Month offers companies a direct way to start moving the engagement needle.
Manager involvement is key. If managers are empowered to make employees feel appreciated regularly and consistently, they can lay the foundations for a streamlined and effective employee recognition strategy.

But anyone who's tried to start a new habit like eating well or exercising knows how difficult it is to maintain. And let’s be clear; employee recognition is a habit—one that companies and leaders must commit to making part of their regular routines.

Research suggests that it can take, on average, two months to make it part of one’s workday routine. But practice makes perfect! Encouraging managers to set up a weekly calendar reminder to spend 15 minutes recognizing colleagues could be a great way to get into the swing of showing frequent appreciation.

Nearly 60% of surveyed employees reported wanting feedback on a daily or weekly basis.⁴
Foundations of Healthy Employee Appreciation

Part 1: Create a culture of recognition

Make it personal. We live in a world of personalization. It’s been proven that the more personal a recognition message is to an individual, the more impactful it is. Getting treats like free lunch or on-site massages as a form of appreciation can be great for teambuilding and wellness, but it’s not ongoing and lacks the personal touch that makes the employee feel valued.

Increase recognition frequency. Start at the top. Leaders must set the recognition standard by taking time out of their week to send recognitions to top performers. Considering the overwhelmingly positive impact it can have on engagement–even to the individual giving the recognition–the small effort is well worth it.

Invest in the technology. Software speeds up the process of recognition program adoption, which is the first step towards a successful employee engagement program. When considering recognition technology, make sure it drives user adoption and is compatible with your overall goals as an organization.

Leaders must set the standard by sending daily or weekly recognitions to top performers on their teams.

Part 2: Build effective feedback systems

Listen to your employees. There’s really no more an underrated form of showing appreciation than simply making employees feel heard. Leadership expert Brian Tracy⁵ puts it bluntly: “Every time you fail to use listening skills and withhold your close attention from another person when they are talking, you make them feel valueless and unimportant. You start to create a negative downward spiral that can lead to unhappiness and disaffection in a workplace.”
Ensure feedback goes two ways. That open channel between you and your team should allow information to flow in both directions. Providing the ability to ask questions and offer opinions is one of the key drivers of employee engagement. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) highlights “constant feedback from employees” as one of the ways in which managers and HR departments can build a culture of engaged workers.

Enable frequent employee check-ins. Having a direct line to your employees via regular check-ins ensures that you don’t lose track of any employee. Those individuals who are quietly productive can just as quietly fall between the cracks and start searching for a job where their diligence is recognized. Engagement must be nurtured proactively across all employees, even those who appear to be doing well on their own.

"Every time you fail to use listening skills and withhold your close attention from another person when they are talking, you make them feel valueless and unimportant. You start to create a negative downward spiral that can lead to unhappiness and disaffection in a workplace.” — Brian Tracy, Leadership Success Expert

Part 3: Take action on the feedback

The key to translating listening skills to effective management lies in taking what you learn from your employees’ feedback and translating it into action.

This doesn’t mean that you have to act on every suggestion or concern that your team has. But, you should always closely evaluate what they have to say. When you come across employee suggestions or concerns that call for more attention, don’t stop at just listening – take action by developing a plan.

Leverage technology. Technology can help with delivering bite-sized, personalized actions to employees and managers so that everyone is empowered to impact engagement right away. When your employees know that you are willing to make changes based on ideas or issues they have shared, they will know that you not only want to listen to them – but that you truly care about what they have to say.

Build trust with action. Taking action to remedy a problematic situation becomes a win-win feedback cycle, because it allows you to build trust with your team that will likely result in greater transparency on their part, moving forward. Over time, your employees will have confidence in the fact that bringing an issue up with you is the first step to solving it.
Bill Gosling Outsourcing

Technology provides access to a bevy of different mediums and channels that can be used to convey a message. Bill Gosling Outsourcing took the opportunity to get creative with their Employee Appreciation Week approach. Bill Gosling Outsourcing CEO, David Rae, tried out his acting chops by starring in a heartfelt (and humorous – a blooper reel was included!) video message that was shared across their social media platforms.

They wanted to make a direct appeal to employees by sharing a genuine message through a popular medium. And it certainly worked to promote positive recognition activity across their Achievers program. During Employee Appreciation Week, their total recognitions received increased a staggering 402.6% and their total unique recognitions (not including bulk recognitions) sent increased by 619.6%. If a picture is worth a thousand words, how much is a video worth?
Mercedes-Benz Canada

Give a little, get a little was the approach Mercedes-Benz Canada took to foster an inclusive Employee Appreciation celebration. Having just launched their Achievers recognition program, they strategically leveraged launch momentum to promote the program and explain the motivation for implementation.

Their campaign integrated multiple elements to drive adoption and participation by showing top-down support of their program through a bulk recognition from the CEO and behavior-based incentives where members were rewarded with points for positive recognition activity. Participation they wanted, and participation they got: received recognition index increased 300% and sent recognition index increased 389%! Looks like the Mercedes-Benz team is on the road to cultivating a culture of recognition.

Financial Services Firm

Friendly competition is an excellent way to spur participation, especially if it’s paired with a clear call to action. A client who is a large financial institution took this approach in developing and rolling out a #payitforward type of challenge across their lines of business (LOBs), with the winner demonstrating the largest percentage increase in recognitions sent during Employee Appreciation Week.

The challenge was promoted through themed graphics and communications across their intranet, on the Achievers platform and via digital displays. The results were notable on multiple fronts. The top two LOBs increased their sent recognitions by an impressive 37.12% and 37.1% respectively, with overall recognitions sent growing by 26%. The number of recognitions sent on the first day of their #payitforward challenge came close to surpassing the sum of all recognitions sent during their Employee Appreciation campaign. Inspiring robust recognition activity through competition? Check.
ESS launched a robust employee appreciation campaign with multiple opportunities for employees to get involved and also offered incentives to help drive participation. Their campaign was not only a reflection of their huge appreciation for their team, but a strategy to garner increased participation in the festivities.

Incentive programs, including the distribution of additional points to award, prizes for being a top recognizer and account activation bonuses (to name a few), ran alongside graphics and communications promoting Employee Appreciation Week.

The verdict on their approach? A roaring success: **total recognitions received increased 128% and total unique recognitions sent increased 215%**. If you want to drive specific behaviors, incentivize; whether with points, prizes, or a good, old fashioned “Thank you!”
The truth is: Employee Appreciation Day has a tendency of creeping up on the calendar. Before you realize it, the day has come! Your employees spend every day ensuring the business continues to succeed, so here are some easy, last-minute employee appreciation ideas that you can use to celebrate the special day.

### 25 Last-Minute Employee Appreciation Ideas

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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Group lunches with different senior leadership</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Employee buddy lunches</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Office board game day or scavenger hunt</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Do your employee’s job for a day (with proper supervision!)</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>All-company leadership Q&amp;A lunch</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>Upgrade old office furniture or technology</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>Lunch-and-learn with external speakers</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>On-site masseuse or manicurist</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Home cleaning or window washing coupons</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td>Free pass for time off or late arrival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Power of Employee Appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fancy new espresso machine or sparkling water maker</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Half day</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Company or personal volunteer day</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Credit for personal or professional development class</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Free or discounted gym memberships</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Catered breakfast, lunch, or both!</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Off-site activity like bowling, escape rooms, karaoke, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Start a company mentoring program</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Free yoga or other exercise class</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Bring your pet to work day</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Hand-written or virtual appreciation notes</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Gift certificates for childcare or dinner</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Artisan food or snack delivery</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Company picnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Voluntary, all-company talent show</td>
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Employee-centric holidays offer a great way to kickstart or accelerate your company’s recognition efforts. But a single event can feel hollow without more consistent appreciation throughout the year. With a long-term recognition strategy in place, holidays like Employee Appreciation Day highlights a company’s commitment to the employee experience.

At Achievers, we like to say that Employee Appreciation Week is the Oscars of recognition. If there is ever a time during the year to go all in on recognition, this is it. As the above examples demonstrate, when you come up with creative ways to promote recognition, the results speak for themselves. The important thing is to encourage participation and program adoption in order to build a culture of recognition that honors the contributions of your workforce. After all, a company’s most valuable asset is its human capital.
Achievers Employee Success Platform delivers proven tools for organizations to empower every employee as an owner of organizational culture and engagement. Built on over a decade of engagement science leadership, hundreds of global customers rely on Achievers' dynamic employee recognition, coaching, and continuous listening tools for their people to feel valued and heard, to align on strategic values and goals, and ignite a positive organizational culture.

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3 2015 Achievers Workplace Survey


