



5

EASY WAYS to Reward Your Team

By Caroline Cooper

You can bring a smile to your team members' faces—and it won't cost you a fortune in bonuses or incentives.

People are often called a business's "most valued asset." In experience-based businesses, more than in any other type, your team can make or break the customer experience. Team members are also among your biggest overhead expenses. Are you unwittingly demotivating them by treating them as just another disposable asset?

Keeping your team inspired and engaged can be challenging. But a demotivated team can yield poor performance, poor customer service, poor attendance, and ultimately the loss not only of your best people but also of your valued customers.

So how do you show your team members that you value them? What incentives will indicate that you appreciate them without costing the earth?

Before you do anything, start by finding out what's important to your team members. Not everyone is motivated by the same things. In fact, I can recall one client recently

who had wanted to reward someone for going the extra mile with some customers and therefore nominated this employee as Employee of the Month. You and I might think this person would have been pleased to be nominated, but he didn't like it one bit. In fact, he actually put in a grievance against his line manager! I know this example might be a bit extreme, but we should never make assumptions about what our team will like or what's important to them.

1. Say "Thank You"

The simplest thing you can do is to actually say "thank you." Recognize and reward good performance, achievements, and a job well done. For many team members, this is the only motivation required.

Yes, your team members work for pay, but it always helps people to

know that their work is recognized. And don't make your verbal thanks just a routine passing comment—go out of your way to thank individuals

when you spot them doing something that will delight your customers.

Bring the team together at the end of a hectic day or shift during which everybody has pulled their weight to make sure everything goes smoothly, and offer your thanks then. If you are genuine in your appreciation and wait for the right moment to offer it, verbal thanks can work wonders. A simple but honest appreciative remark can go a long way.

During this kind of meeting with your team, give feedback: let people know what they have done well and how it has contributed—and don't be reluctant to demonstrate where they have fallen short and how their work can be improved. All this feedback adds up to even better performance next time around (as long as you're not nitpicking, of course!). Just make sure you follow the "sandwich" rule: open with something positive, offer your

constructive feedback, and close with something positive again (for example, your gratitude for a job well done).

Celebrate and share your employees' successes. And if you are going to praise someone, don't just leave it until you are on your own with the employee. Find an opportunity when he or she is with colleagues, and your praise will create buzz! Make sure your kudos are genuine and specific to the task carried out, or colleagues might see the person as a "teacher's pet."

Become aware of your employees' hobbies and interests. Then, when you are out and about and see something that has to do with that particular interest, pick it up for them. Coming into the business and saying, "I really appreciate what

you do, and I got this for you as a small token of my appreciation," will make them feel recognized for a great job. The gift doesn't have to cost the earth; just a token will do. But the appreciation your thoughtful gift evokes will make a real difference.



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2. Offer Treats

Give people the occasional treat. It doesn't have to be a lavish incentive; look at ways to reward that create a win-win situation—maybe a visit to a sister business, or an overnight stay somewhere where they will be on the receiving end of outstanding service. Brief jaunts like these can motivate your clients to bring back fresh ideas to implement in your business.

When your team has worked long or unsociable hours that have impacted their personal lives, extend the treat to be shared with their loved ones. This thoughtfulness not only makes your team member feel good but also shows that you appreciate the support he or she receives from friends and family and paves the way for future good deeds.

3. Time Off

For some people, free time is the most valuable gift of all. Allowing employees the flexibility to go home early, come in late, or take an additional day off to attend to a personal matter or just have a bit of fun can work wonders for their state of mind.

4. Prizes

Offering prizes in a competition works for employees with a competitive spirit. This type of incentive might require focusing on a different theme each month so that everyone has the opportunity to recognize his or her particular skills and strengths.

External awards are a great way to recognize the whole team. Keep your eye out for awards that are relevant to your business or market. Just being nominated for awards is a great booster. I remember when I worked in the corporate world and took over responsibility for sales training. Our new sales director was so impressed with what I had achieved he put me forward for the Institute of Marketing Sales Trainer of the Year award. I didn't win, but I was one of the finalists, which gave me a great boost—as well as an opportunity to invite my colleagues along to the awards dinner, which was great for both my profile and the business.

5. Development Opportunities

We so often think of development solely as grooming somebody for promotion. This might be one intention or outcome, but even when we know that a member of our team has probably reached his or her peak, we shouldn't just let that person stagnate.

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Development should aim to make people the best they can be at their jobs. Identify and utilize people's strengths, providing further development when needed to bring out the best in these areas. Delegate to your team members some control and ownership, such as making people champions in specific areas. This tactic gives employees pride in what they do, and they will appreciate that you've recognized where they do a good job—provided, of course, that you're careful not to overburden or just dump these tasks on your employees.

Grow your business from within where possible, and give people opportunities to progress in their careers, as well as to enhance the skills needed to do their existing jobs. Think also about life skills—for example, offering English lessons to migrant workers.

You may not be able to accommodate everyone's aspirations, particularly if you're a small business, but it's a good idea to have some kind of succession plan in place that gives people something to work toward. Do take the time to discuss your employees' aspirations; don't just assume that, if someone shows potential, he or she wants more responsibility or seeks to be groomed for a specific position.

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And be careful not to make promises regarding career moves that you're unable to keep.

Do a little homework and apply a little creativity, and you can find plenty of ways to recognize and reward your team. The care you show will bring smiles to their faces, which they'll be sure to pass on to your customers. **N**

Caroline Cooper, founder of Naturally Loyal, helps businesses gain more sales through their existing customers. Caroline specializes in working with "experience-based" businesses, where customers patronize a firm based on the experience they receive—for example, hospitality, visitor attractions, retail luxury items, and gifts. She can be contacted via her website at www.naturallyloyal.com.