

June 2011

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Leveraging smaller perks can boost morale

A small business depends on the dedication of its employees to achieve success. Unlike larger companies, however, it might not be able to offer costly benefits to boost morale and loyalty. But there are numerous inexpensive ways a smaller business can show its appreciation to employees without spending a bundle.

"While you may not be able to offer your employees extravagant benefits like an on-site gym or a cafeteria with gourmet food, there are many simple things you can do to show your employees you appreciate them," says Joe Blattner, founder of COMPackage.com, a company that provides software to track and report employee benefits and compensation.

According to *Entrepreneur* magazine, many smaller business are now providing plenty of attractive low-cost perks that are yielding some positive results. Here are some low-cost employee perks as cited by *Entrepreneur* that should keep your employees enthusiastic and your business thriving.

- Employee discounts.** A simple way to reward your staff is by offering discounts or freebies on some of your products or services, such as offering free checking or lower loan rates in the case of a financial institution.
- Flextime.** Allowing personnel to clock in later in the morning and end their day later in the evening may help reduce the stress of long commutes to and from work, and may also help increase productivity.
- Work at home.** For jobs suited to telecommuting, offer some staff, especially those with a long commute, the option of working from home one or two days per week. This can be a big incentive, and the employee will save money on gas and tolls and eliminate the added stress of driving in traffic or inclement weather.
- Breakfast.** Consider serving a light breakfast on Mondays or Fridays. Start the day with individual boxed cereals and milk, pastries, bagels, tea, and coffee. It's a welcome way to begin or end the workweek.



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- **Health club discounts.** If you have enough employees interested in joining a local health club, you will likely receive a group discount on membership. In addition, you may further lower employee out-of-pocket costs if your business assumes some of the financial burden.
- **Yoga breaks.** Hire a certified yoga teacher to come in one or two mornings or afternoons per week. It's an inexpensive way to reduce employee tension and make for a more congenial work atmosphere.
- **Free seminars.** There's no shortage of business professionals who offer to speak for free as a form of promotion for themselves and their services. Consider offering a seminar each month on various topics, such as financial planning.
- **Family picnics.** Having a summer picnic can help employees and their families to bond in a relaxed way. Consider having it at a local park, and serve catered sandwiches and finger food or have a "potluck" where everyone brings a favorite picnic dish and you supply the burgers, chicken, and hot dogs to grill.
- **Bring Fido to work day.** Sometimes the presence of a sweet dog can be a great mood enhancer. Allow one person per week to bring in her pooch, as long as the dog has a sweet and easygoing temperament and other employees nearby don't object. (For instance, some people are allergic to dogs.)
- **New-hire incentives.** If one of your employees recommends a candidate for a job and the recruit is hired and remains at his position for three months, reward the person who recommended the new hire with a paid day off.

These are just some of the ways to offer inexpensive employee benefits. Ask your staff for other ideas not mentioned in this list. Just asking lets your staff know that you care. And remember, though it doesn't cost a dime, thanking your team for a job well done can also help boost morale and reinforce a sense of appreciation. You can't put a price on that.

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