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[WORKPLACE WELL-BEING: DION KLEIN]

Time for a pat on the back

Year-end rewards

The holiday season is a good time to thank employees for their efforts but how achievement is acknowledged needs careful thought

AS THE holiday season approaches, organisations are planning their office parties, gift exchanges and bonuses. It is a great time (and, for some, an excuse) to get the staff together to celebrate their successes during the year.

Some organisations save giving their rewards to staff until the end of the year. What they must be careful of is that incentives lose their power and motivational effects when given in bulk — holiday bonuses do not seem to enhance productivity, especially with the Generation X and Y workforces.

Today's workplace is characterised by impersonal e-mails, little face-to-face contact, and lack of unity and community. To get a handwritten memo, a human voice on the telephone, or a thank-you from your boss seems rare nowadays. The end of the year is a good opportunity to show a personal touch and for managers to be genuine, sincere, and specific in praising fellow employees.

Much has been written on performance incentives and reward systems. A study by Within Worldwide (2000) found a discrepancy between how employers and their staff regard

rewards. The two most frequent things employers did for their employees as year-end or holiday rewards were office parties (52 per cent) and cash bonuses (49 per cent). However, the employees much preferred the cash bonuses (46 per cent) to parties (11 per cent).

One study investigated the impact of informal rewards, known as "pats on the back", and found them to be extremely effective and sometimes more valuable to employees than monetary rewards. As Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, observed, "There are two things people want more than sex and money — recognition and praise." A study in 1990 found that the top two incentives for employees were receiving verbal congratulations by the manager following a job well done or a personal note of congratulations from the manager.

Have you ever thought about sending a handwritten thank-you to your employee's partner? In today's working culture, more people are staying behind after work which is affecting family life.

And speaking of time, why not give the gift of time? Everyone complains about not having enough time, especially as we approach the holiday season. Allow your employees to take the day off (or half-day) to take care of personal matters. It is a gift they will appreciate year-long.

Some employees may wish to volunteer their time for charities; allow them the day off. Better

yet, have the staff get-together and visit a hospital or retirement home to share the holiday cheer. This is a great way for team bonding and doing something good for the community.

Lastly, particularly for this holiday season, for those offices who support the gift-giving and gift-wrapping frenzy, you could leave boxes, ribbon, wrapping paper, tape and greeting cards in a spare room so your staff can take care of "wrapping business" after some lunchtime shopping. This would be a welcome benefit for those having little time at home to keep the presents a secret from the children (or partners).

In a society where there is such strong competition to find and retain employees, the smallest gestures of appreciation can have a huge positive impact on an individual. Taking time out to say thank-you to your employees during this time of year could make a difference to your success in 2004.

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Resources:
Nelson, B. & Blanchard, K. H. (2001). *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*.

The Xylo Report: How Year-End Holiday Rewards Impact Workplace Loyalty (2000). www.xylo.com/xyloreport/xr-0012.htm
Rewards with a Personal Touch. www.IrishJobs.ie

PARTIED OUT



A study has found a discrepancy between how employers and staff regard rewards: while more than 50 per cent of employers provided parties, employees much preferred cash bonuses (46 per cent) to parties (11 per cent).