

12 WAYS TO OPTIMIZE EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PROGRAM



12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and rewards

Special Report from www.BusinessManagementDaily.com

EDITOR

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

PUBLISHER

Kathy A. Shipp

Patrick DiDomenico

Adam Goldstein

Phillip A. Ash

© 2019 Business Management Daily, a division of Capitol Information Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Substantial duplication of this report is prohibited. However, we encourage you to excerpt from this report as long as you include a hyperlink back to <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram>. The hyperlink must be included on every usage of the report title. Alternatively, you may simply link to the aforementioned page on our site. Any reproduction in print form requires advance permission by contacting the publisher at (800) 543-2055 or customer@BusinessManagementDaily.com. Any violation is subject to legal action.

This content is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal service. If you require legal advice, please seek the services of an attorney.

12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and rewards

So, the top brass has decided you must scale back to save money? Make sure you don't drive your best employees away—at the very time you need them most. If you've had to cut pay and staff and now expect more from those who remained, it's vital to revamp your employee recognition and rewards program.

Yes, money is great and benefits are nice, but there's one key thing that keeps good employees from walking away: knowing that management appreciates them and their work. (Fact: 60% of employees say they do not feel *recognized*.)

Employers can double their rewards and recognition efforts in innovative, cost-efficient ways. *Examples:* employee-of-the-month awards, incentive pay, employee appreciation luncheons, more time off, shopping sprees, wellness incentive contests, plus employee rewards customized to motivate Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and the Matures.

Now is the time to get clever with your employee appreciation programs. This special report, *Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program*, will show you how. Discover low-cost, inspiring ways that your organization can motivate and express gratitude to your employees year-round.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Tip #1

8 rules for recognizing and rewarding employees

Surveys of U.S. workers consistently show that employees want more than a paycheck from their jobs—they want to feel safe, secure and *appreciated* at work.

Good recognition and rewards provide employees with:

- A fair return for their efforts
- Motivation to maintain and improve their performance
- Clarification of what behaviors and outcomes the organization values.

Here are eight guidelines for recognizing and rewarding employees that managers can use in their departments, according to an Adecco management report:

1. Specify employee rewards criteria. Too often, awards for things like “innovation,” “showing initiative” and “quality improvement” don't define what employees need to do to win. Without that information, some employees will be stymied before they begin.

When a winner is announced, employees may attribute a co-worker's success to favoritism or luck. So make the criteria for rewards as clear as possible.

2. Reward everyone who meets the criteria. You could announce a contest, urge everyone to participate, provide plenty of reminders during the contest period and announce the winner with a flourish. Then what? You've got one winner and a lot of losers who discover that their hard work didn't pay off.

For a longer-term impact, determine specific criteria and individual goals, and then reward everyone who meets them. Publicize each accomplishment and acknowledge every achiever. As long as the criteria are meaningful, the more winners, the better!

3. Individualize employee rewards. Generic rewards create generic results. Give people what they want. *Example:* Before you give a workaholic a week off, make sure it won't feel like exile to that person. On the other hand, before you reward someone with an exciting new project, find out if the recipient will be thrilled or feel burdened.

4. Say "thank you" frequently. "Thank you" is always timely. It is as useful to acknowledge small successes as it is to recognize major achievements. It validates the importance of the work people do. And it starts a chain reaction: Pretty soon, more people start saying it to more people, boosting morale and improving relationships as well as furthering employee motivation.

5. Nurture self-esteem. When you give people positive, specific and realistic feedback about their potential, their efforts and accomplishments, that boosts their self-esteem. They develop into employees with confidence to set and meet challenging goals, overcome setbacks and self-manage their work.

6. Foster intrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards are the good feelings people get from doing their work: enjoyment of the task, excitement about the opportunities and pride in doing a good job.

You can't hand someone an intrinsic reward, but you can create an environment that encourages these feelings.

Make sure people know their work is worthwhile. Treat problems as opportunities for innovation. Encourage people to try new ways of doing things. And let them know when they have done a good job.

7. Reward the whole team. For team accomplishments, it's important to reward the whole team; otherwise, you foster competition, not cooperation, among team members. Still, some team members may give more effort—and get more results. In contrast, some team members may coast along on the efforts of others. When the coasters get the same reward as the doers, resentment occurs.

One option: Meet this challenge with a double-tiered system of team and individual rewards. *Key point:* The individual rewards are based on judgments from their fellow team members.

8. Remember: You get what you reward. Since one of the things rewards do is clarify for employees what the organization really wants, employees quickly determine the company values.

If you are looking for teamwork, be sure you aren't rewarding competition. If you want people to resolve problems, don't reward them for covering up complaints. If you ask for initiative, you may even need to reward people for doing things in unconventional ways.

The bottom line: Remember that employees can feel rewarded in many ways, not merely with cash. For top performers, increased responsibility and lessened supervision can be rewards in themselves, as can flexible schedules, additional time off, first pick of desirable assignments, and so on.

The point is that employees must indeed feel that you are rewarding them for both working hard and getting results.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #2

Employee recognition: Have you hugged your employees today?

by Peter Hart, CEO, [Rideau Recognition Solutions](#); president, the Recognition Council

You might think that employee recognition is about the rewards you give workers for long years of service or for retiring after a notable career. It's really not.

Recognition is about employee engagement. And employee engagement starts with *employer engagement*. How engaged are you with your employees? Do you know their names? Their goals? What makes them tick?

Recognition doesn't have to be about gold watches or cash bonuses. It's even more effective when it's about relationships.

Continue (or start) to appreciate your employees and recognize them for what they do. Know their names, their stories. Let them know yours. Let them in on the organization's mission, vision and values. Establish trust.

2 rules for employee recognition

Treat your employees well. How you treat people today is going to determine whether your valued employees stay with you when the financial crisis is over. I have two rules:

1. The Golden Rule: Treat your employees as you want them to treat your company. How can you expect them to be loyal to the company if you're not loyal to them? How can you expect them to be engaged at work if you're not engaged with them?

2. The Platinum Rule: Treat your employees as you want them to treat your customers. It's no coincidence that some of the most profitable companies in America are also known as the best places to work.

You can't follow these two rules by simply paying people more. Even though employees often say they want cash, research shows that personal, noncash incentives are much more powerful and a bigger lift than dollars and cents or a tricked-out iPhone.

You can cut back on the tangible rewards, but never cut back on the recognition. Research shows that the absence of recognition is the second-leading cause of burnout and stress in the workplace. So its presence should have the opposite effect.

Recognition is a powerful tool—but it takes a real leader to use it right. The physical stuff like the gold watches are the things the company usually delivers. It's the emotional stuff that managers so often fail to deliver. And that's why people "quit their managers." You can stop it without spending a dime.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #3

12 low-cost employee appreciation strategies that work

Here are 12 low-cost ways that your organization can show gratitude to your employees all year.

1. Embarrassment committees. To celebrate a person's annual anniversary on the job, form an "embarrassment committee" to make a ruckus as colleagues deliver a cookie bouquet and gift card.

2. Employee Appreciation Week. During one special week, serve breakfast one day, lunch on another and a make-your-own-sundae party on a third.

3. Children's art contest. A couple of times a year, exhibit around the building artwork that employees' kids have created.

4. Door prizes for staff meetings. To add some fun and encourage attendance, hold a drawing for a small door prize before all-staff meetings.

5. "You've been caught" program. Encourage managers and employees to notify HR when they "catch" a colleague in the act of going beyond the call of duty. At monthly staff meetings, introduce all nominated employees, and mention what the person did. Choose one winner at random for a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

- 6. Baby blankets.** Send blankets to every employee who welcomes home a new child.
- 7. Safety-record lunches.** Host congratulatory lunches when employees meet safety goals and department milestones.
- 8. Newsletter features.** Include a monthly “Employee Spotlight” column in the organization’s newsletter. The newsletter also can include comments from customers who have praised an employee’s work.
- 9. Mini-massage.** Bring in a massage therapist every now and then to give complimentary 10-minute shoulder massages.
- 10. Birthday shirts.** Have your CEO sign a birthday card for each employee and send it to the worker along with a company logo shirt on his or her special day.
- 11. Perks for extra work.** Surprise employees who have worked long hours to finish a project with a small cash bonus or a weekend at a bed-and-breakfast.
- 12. Feedback from supervisors.** This one might be the best. Encourage management to orally recognize employees on an ongoing basis.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #4

Tailor employee rewards to generational differences

Most organizations choose rewards based on budgets, tradition and management choices. Or they may use surveys that solicit preferences but don’t analyze the results according to generational differences.

That’s a mistake more organizations are trying to rectify.

Nearly a third (32%) of HR professionals plan to alter their total rewards programs with generational preferences in mind, according to a *Top Five Total Rewards Priorities* survey by Deloitte LLP and the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists.

That percentage is likely to increase significantly in the future because the workforce is becoming more multigenerational—especially as older workers remain longer to rebuild their nest eggs.

More organizations are customizing employee rewards programs to accommodate the values, lifestyles, work habits and interests of different generations. Even low-budget programs can offer rewards that appeal to different generations.

The death of one-size-fits-all benefits

Here are the different rewards that consultants say best motivate the four generations:

■ **Millennials** were born between 1981 and 1999. They are computer-literate, easily bored and require frequent challenges. They need work/life balance and value education.

Millennials value extra break time, recognition from clients and contributing to pet causes.

This generation also values gift certificates for music and video; tickets to concerts and sporting events; transportation subsidies and reimbursement; iPads, smartphones and other tech tools.

■ **Gen Xers** were born between 1965 and 1980. For them, productivity means working smarter, not longer and harder. They balance work and personal life and are self-possessed, versatile employees.

This generation values flex-time, working from home, leading a new project team and recognition from clients. Gen Xers also value bonuses based on performance, weekend trips, tuition reimbursement and annual salary increases.

■ **Baby Boomers** were born between 1946 and 1964. Their careers tend to focus on one organization or industry.

Boomers value recognition, such as employee of the month awards, oral acknowledgment from clients, parking passes and promotions.

This generation also values cash rewards, bonuses, free day care for a specified period, training seminars, membership in a club or organization and dining with the boss.

■ **Matures** were born before 1946. They are self-starters who have often sacrificed family time for work and tend to be loyal employees. They want respect for their experience and sacrifices.

Matures value oral recognition from bosses and clients, award certificates, extra time off and serving as mentors to age-group peers and new employees. Matures also value salary increases, 401(k) matches, bonuses, profit sharing and cash rewards for suggestions that lead to workplace improvement.

Advice: These are generalizations, so survey your staff to determine what types of rewards and recognition each age group values most.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #5

How to make your rewards and recognition programs fun

by Matt Weinstein, president of [Playfair, Inc.](#); author of **Managing To Have Fun**

The problem with standardized reward and recognition programs is that they are completely impersonal processes. Instead of thinking about the specific people involved, the company provides the same generic awards to everyone. But when an element of fun and play is added, the experience becomes personalized and much more memorable for the award recipient, without additional financial expense.

If you can make the reward and recognition process fun, your employees will talk about the event long after it's ended, and you will have multiplied its team-building impact many, many times.

Example 1: The shopping spree

Dr. Jeff Alexander of the Youthful Tooth dental office calculated that he could give a \$200 bonus to each employee. But Alexander knew that if he just added \$200 to each paycheck, his staff would have been excited for a little while, but probably would use the money for something "practical." So Alexander closed his office for two hours one afternoon, took all 35 employees to a shopping mall and handed each an envelope containing \$200 in cash.

"This is not your money," he told them. "It's my money. But anything you buy for yourself with this money in the next hour is yours to keep. Here are the rules: You have to spend it on gifts for yourself. You have one hour to spend it, and you have to buy at least five different items. Any money you haven't spent in the next hour comes back to me. Go get 'em!"

His employees spent the next hour dashing wildly from store to store, yelling back and forth to each other about treasures they'd found. "That was a real treat for them—and it gave me a great feeling, watching them having fun," Alexander said.

Example 2: Ford has a better idea

Ford Motor Co. spent more than \$1 million on one memorable evening, demonstrating that Alexander's idea can be easily adapted to fit a more extravagant budget as well. Ford rented out Nordstrom's department store in San Francisco one evening and gave \$5,000 in spending money to each of its 250 top-selling sales managers, who were in town for a national sales meeting. Ford hired sports celebrities such as Tommy Lasorda and Julius Erving to accompany the sales managers on their shopping sprees.

The bottom line: No matter what your budget, you can make the bonus fun.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #6

Employee Appreciation Day ideas: Salute your staff

Employers host employee recognition events throughout the year, but the first Friday in March is the official Employee Appreciation Day, according to Recognition Professionals International.

Buy bagels or lunch for the staff, close shop early or just say thanks.

Employers have the option of extending the holiday for a variety of reasons. An Employee Appreciation Week might include, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, an ice cream social or picnic, a mini music concert during lunch hour, prize drawings, family fun day, chili cook-off or a casual dress code for the entire week.

In addition to fun events, the week can provide various beneficial activities for the employees, such as a health and wellness fair or workshops.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #7

8 proven ways to retain, reward, recognize your best employees

At Florida-based Baptist Hospital, the CEO declared an all-out war on turnover, pulling out all the stops to tear down typical corporate walls and retain his best workers.

He decided to move out of the executive suite, eliminate executive perks, park the farthest away in the parking lot, give employees his home phone number to call if they have questions, make daily rounds of employees, hand-write thank-you notes to employees and send managers to a leadership academy.

That CEO is one of the corporate leaders who “gets it,” according to Greg Smith, author of the book, *401 Proven Ways to Retain Your Best Employees*.

Here are seven more real-world examples of efforts by organizations to keep their workers satisfied and in their seats:

1. Keys to the car. A CEO who used to give \$200 cash spot bonuses started giving high performers the keys to a new BMW for the week. (Smith: “People would forget about the \$200 within a month, but they never forgot the BMW.”)

2. **Appreciation phone calls** from the CEO—to employees at home.
3. **“Take a walk in my shoes”** video for the staff showing what one employee did during a typical day.
4. **“Roast, Toast and Boast”** lunches in which managers would roast a long-time employee, toast new hires and boast about a company accomplishment.
5. **Do-it-yourself titles.** Employees were allowed to create their own titles (e.g., a deli manager called himself the “deli-lama”).
6. **“Coins” peer recognition program.** Employees get three coins each quarter to distribute to co-workers who perform beyond the call of duty. Employees cash in their coins for prizes.
7. **Secrets of success videos.** Long-time workers reveal theirs on videos that are shown to new hires.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #8

Using the ACA to your advantage

New rules under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which took effect in 2014, allow employers to reduce the cost of employees’ health insurance premiums if they participate in wellness programs that encourage exercise, smoking cessation, weight loss and health screenings.

The rules say employers may offer premium reductions of up to 30% for participating employees. (Prior rules only allowed for incentives that trimmed 20% from employee premiums.) On the flip side, the rules allow employers to charge smokers up to 50% more for health insurance.

Wellness programs must be structured so “every individual participating” can “receive the full amount of any reward or incentive, regardless of any health factor.” That means participation is the key, not employee success in actually improving their health.

The rules address wellness incentives for two kinds of programs:

- Those in which all employees become eligible for incentives simply by participating. Examples include completing a health assessment or taking a wellness class.
- Programs that aim for achieving a specific health goal, such as trying to lose weight or reduce blood pressure. Those programs are further divided into activities that are “outcomes-based”—lowering cholesterol levels, for example—

and “activity-based” programs that involve physical effort, such as a lunchtime walking club.

Note: If an employer offers monetary incentives for activity-based programs (like lunchtime walking programs), it must offer an alternative way to cash in for employees who are medically unable to participate.

Want healthier staff? Cash incentives might not work best

U.S. employers continue to struggle to change the lifestyle behaviors of their employees, according to a 2015 Towers Watson survey.

One significant reason why: Financial incentives don’t appear to be an effective way to get employees to participate in wellness programs.

Driven by ongoing concerns over worker stress (75%), obesity (70%) and sedentary lifestyles (61%), employer commitment to health and productivity remains strong. Towers Watson found that 84% of U.S. employers say their health programs are essential or moderately important. What’s more, 77% of employers expect their commitment to increase over the next three years.

Yet in the past year, only 50% of employees participated in a well-being activity or health management-related program. Individual program participation was even lower, ranging from 48% for health risk and biometric assessments, to 22% for work-site diet/exercise events, to 8% for healthy-sleep or tobacco-cessation programs.

On average, employers offer employees \$880 through a range of annual incentives, but employees collect only \$365. Two-fifths of all employees don’t earn any incentives at all.

Towers Watson found that many employers do not assess the impact of their wellness programs, with only 46% measuring return on investment.

Those who are most concerned for their health do respond to financial incentives

The Employee Benefit Research Institute recently analyzed the impact that financial incentives had on the first-time participants in a large employer’s wellness program. Researchers looked at those who completed a health risk assessment or biometric screening in the two or three years after financial incentives were offered to workers to participate. Among the report’s findings:

Demographics: Older men were most likely to respond to incentives. Offering financial incentives appeared to increase wellness participation by about 12% among men age 50 and older—more than any other group.

Health status: Incentives appeared attract employees who were in generally poorer health, with relatively high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity. That's good news, because wellness programs are most effective when they target those kinds of risk factors.

The takeaway, according to EBRI: Monetary rewards attract the kinds of employees who can benefit most from a well-designed wellness program.

Where wellness is placing on the priority list

Spending on health care benefits was up in 50% of organizations surveyed in 2015. In contrast, only about a quarter of employers reported spending more on wellness programs and career development.

Source: Society for Human Resource Management survey, October 2015

Health care 50%
Wellness 28%
Career development 26%
Financial literacy 22%
Retirement planning 18%

(% of employers reporting more spending in 2015)

Is anyone listening?

When it comes to workplace wellness programs, the old adage that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink is true.

Only about 24% of those who work for large employers that offer wellness programs actually participate in them.

Most large employers (those with 1,000 or more workers) sponsor programs designed to improve employees' health by, for example, promoting exercise and good nutrition, providing medical screenings and helping workers quit smoking. However, only 60% of those companies' employees are aware of the programs—and fewer than half of those who do know about wellness opportunities decide to participate in them.

Wellness programs' diminishing returns

Large employers offering wellness programs 85%
Employees aware that they have a wellness program 60%
Employees who participate in their wellness program 40%

Source: RAND Corp. and Gallup research, February 2015

From a legal standpoint...

- **Wellness programs must be truly voluntary:** A wellness program must truly be voluntary to stay on the right side of the law. A program is arguably not voluntary if it involves penalties for nonparticipation, such as canceling insurance coverage or shifting an insurance premium to the employee.
- **Employee health information must be kept private:** Health information must be kept confidential under the federal HIPAA law and disability discrimination laws. Store employee health information securely and separately from other personnel documents so it isn't accessible to decision-makers such as supervisors.
- **Programs should not regulate lawful behavior outside of work:** Many states have a lawful consumables product law which protects employees' use of lawful substances, like tobacco and alcohol, outside of the workplace. Some states have even broader laws that also protect any lawful activity outside of work. To avoid running afoul of these laws, wellness programs should not involve any adverse actions based on lawful employee behavior outside of work.
- **Don't forget about disability accommodations:** It can violate disability discrimination laws to deny a disabled employee the opportunity to participate in and obtain incentives tied to a wellness program. So, when implementing a program, be sure to consider and comply with any reasonable accommodation obligations to disabled employees.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Tip #9

'Strategic praising': 6 steps to effective employee recognition

“You're doing a good job.” “That's a great idea.” “Thanks for your extra effort.” For some employees, hearing those words is better than a cash bonus. Yet, many managers can muster up such phrases only during annual reviews—if at all.

“The number-one reason managers don't give recognition is that they don't know how,” says Bob Nelson, author of *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*.

That's why HR professionals need to teach supervisors how to give employee recognition and provide them the tools to make it easier. Studies consistently show that “feeling appreciated” is a key reason employees stick around. And by making employee recognition a companywide effort, you remove a burden from you and make rewards more personal.

Here are Nelson's six guidelines for effective praising:

1. Make it soon. Any recognition is good, but the best kind is given as soon as possible after the good performance.

Example: When an HP software engineer told his supervisor that he fixed a software bug, the supervisor grabbed a banana from his lunch and gave it to the employee with a big “thank you.” Today, the most prestigious award in that HP department is the “Golden Banana” award.

2. Make it sincere. Stop guessing at what rewards people want. Ask them.

Nelson says Medtronic Corp. stopped giving people “stuff” for their years-of-service awards. Instead, they give days off because the company finally asked employees, and that’s what they wanted.

3. Make it specific. If possible, relate the gift to the performance being rewarded.

Example: Apple Computers prints different company core values on T-shirts (“Integrity,” etc.) and gives them to employees who demonstrate those values. “Apple has employees who work hard trying to collect them all,” says Nelson.

4. Make it personal. One bank asks new hires on their first day to write on an index card the three things that motivate them (time off, lunch with the boss, Starbucks coffee, etc.). The card is then given to their supervisors, who can mold rewards around those “wants.”

5. Make it positive and public. When praising employees, don’t undercut it by concluding with a note of criticism. And, when possible, convey the praise in person and in public. With public praising, says Nelson, “you’re sending the message that this is the type of thing that gets rewarded around here.”

6. Make it proactive. Teach supervisors how to be on the lookout for positive behaviors. One tactic: Managers can put the name of every staff member on their weekly to-do list. Then, managers can cross off each name as they dole out praise that week.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Tip #10

Office gift giving: From weird to wonderful employee gifts

Nearly eight out of 10 (79%) executives polled in a recent survey said some form of gift giving occurs in their offices during the holiday season. But it’s not all bottles of wine and Target gift cards out there.

When asked to name the most unusual or unique gifts exchanged in the office, responses ranged from a fully stocked 125-pound aquarium to personalized bobbleheads.

Execs were asked, “During the holiday season, which of the following types of gifts, if any, are typically given in your office?” Their responses:

(Continued on page 16)

Did you ever wonder about the tax consequences when your organization hands out employee achievement awards? If you handle things the right way, the prizes can be tax-free to the employees and fully deductible by your company.

However, you can't use an awards program as a means to disguise taxable compensation. For example, employee awards that are handed out at the same time as annual salary reviews may be suspicious. Similarly, the program can't be substituted for a cash bonus plan.

The tax law defines an “achievement award” as an item of tangible personal property granted to an employee for either length of service or promoting safety. This includes items ranging from gold watches to smartphones. But cash or cash-equivalent gifts (e.g., gift certificates) don't qualify as tangible personal property. The plan must meet these requirements to qualify for favorable tax treatment:

- * Any employee may receive a length-of-service award, but safety awards cannot be made to managers, administrators, clerical workers and other professional employees. Also, an award doesn't qualify if the company granted safety awards to more than 10% of the eligible employees during the same year.

- * The award must be part of a “meaningful presentation.” The occasion should be marked by a ceremony befitting the occasion.

- * The employee must have worked for the company a minimum of five years to receive a length-of-service award. Note: An employee isn't eligible for this type of award if he or she received a length-of-service award during the current year or the previous four years.

How much can an employee receive tax-free? It depends on whether the award is nonqualified or qualified. With a nonqualified award, the annual maximum is \$400. The maximum for a qualified award is \$1,600 (including any nonqualified awards). Any excess can't be deducted by the employer and is taxable to the employee.

For a “qualified” award, two additional requirements must be met.

(1) The award must be paid under a written plan that doesn't discriminate in favor of highly compensated employees.

(2) The average cost of all employee achievement awards granted during the year cannot exceed \$400. In determining the average cost, awards of nominal value (i.e., \$50 or less) aren't taken into account.

(Continued from page 15)

- **51%** Gifts from managers to staff members
- **51%** Gifts from staff members to each other
- **43%** Gifts from co-workers based on names dropped in a hat
- **39%** Gifts from staff to their managers
- **19%** None/no gifts given

“Given the current economy, office gift giving may be toned down, but there still will be those who want to spread holiday cheer by giving colleagues tokens of appreciation,” said Megan Slabinski, executive director of The Creative Group, the staffing company that commissioned the survey.

“Although presents don’t have to be expensive, they do need to be thoughtful and appropriate to the work environment,” Slabinski said. “A gift that works in one setting may not be well received in another.”

Asked about some of the more ... er ... novel gifts they’d received or heard of, the executives offered the following gems:

- “Someone gave a co-worker a voodoo doll of the boss. The boss found out and wasn’t very happy about it.”
- “A colleague gave me orange hair extensions. I wasn’t sure what they were for.”
- “One employee liked to give out portraits of himself. I’m glad I never received one.”
- “A person gave a colleague a fully stocked 125-pound aquarium.”

But others raved about thoughtful, memorable and personal gifts:

- “My favorite and most memorable gift was a membership to a local art gallery.”
- “We got Ohio State football helmets because we are all Ohio State football fans.”
- “Each employee received a bobblehead that was a replica of him- or herself.”
- “An employee made a photo collage of our art director’s children.”
- “My staff gave me two pounds of stone crab last year. They were delicious.”

And, finally, there were gifts that keep on giving:

- “We gave a certificate to a charity in the person’s name.”
- “We elect, as a staff, to distribute gifts to families that are needy.”

Tip: With so-called “giving certificates” (www.charitychecks.us), you select the gift-check amount and the recipient picks the charity. *Example:* You give 10 employees \$50 charity checks that they can donate to their favorite causes. The bonus: Your organization can take a \$500 tax deduction.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Tip #11

Do your homework before selecting gift cards for employees

Still handing out engraved pens and five-year pins to worthy employees? That's not what they want. Workers say gift cards make the best employee gifts, rewards or incentives, according to surveys.

But buying gift cards from stores during a recession could be risky. Before you spend your incentive budget on cards that generate more problems than appreciation, do some homework. Here are six ways to make sure your organization doesn't waste its money on gift cards that don't deliver.

- 1. Before you buy gift cards from a retail chain,** find out whether it has closed any of its stores or is expected to file for bankruptcy. Some stores have refused to honor gift cards once they got into financial trouble.
- 2. Limit your selection to retailers** that will accept the gift cards at many store locations and online so employees can shop where it's convenient.
- 3. Tell employees about any limitations** or conditions on a gift card; don't assume they will learn these on their own. Some cards—particularly those for general shopping at malls and prepaid bank or credit card-issued gift cards—have expiration dates or charge penalties for every month they go unused. The top 25 retailers, on the other hand, issue cards that do not expire, and 84% of them are fee-free, according to the National Retail Federation.
- 4. Don't buy gift cards from online auction sites.** There's a chance they're counterfeit or stolen.
- 5. Remind employees to use the gift cards** you give them before the cards expire or lose their value over time.
- 6. Keep your receipts.** Some retailers will replace a lost gift card if you have your original purchase receipt.

One reason employers like gift cards: Issuing a cash bonus through payroll takes time, so it's not an instant reward for a job well done. A gift card offered on the spot is.

Tip: Hand out prepaid American Express, MasterCard or Visa cards instead of cards for clothing or specialty stores. Employees can spend them wherever they want—the gas station, pharmacy or grocery store. (*Caution:* These cards often come with expiration dates. Warn your employees that hanging onto a card for too long could invalidate it.) Also, if you buy gift cards in bulk from retailers, ask if they'll throw in coupons or discounts for employees who redeem them.

Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program:

Tip #12

What's Working: Real-world rewards

On-site scuba lessons, desks on wheels, employee shopping sprees and unlimited time off are just a few of the ways innovative employers recruit, reward, retain and refresh workers. See if any of these best practices—some simple, some extravagant—inspire you to take a fresh look at your company's perks:



Verizon, the phone, wireless and cable TV giant, encourages employees to post videos of themselves showing and telling their colleagues how to perform job-related tasks or solve common problems. Through 2013, workers had posted more than 2,800 videos on the company's intranet video site, VZTube. With more than 2 million views, the videos have gone viral—at least internally.

Videos depict employees demonstrating the use of computer software and other business tools. One popular video—about Samsung's Droid Charge smartphone—logged 1,240 views within minutes of being posted.



After its research showed that consumers respond well to pitches that involve playing games, marketing firm Upstream Systems “gamified” its own search for job candidates.

Applicants for five marketing campaign manager positions competed for the job by competing in an online challenge, which senior VP Guy Krief said was designed to attract “the right kind of candidates for this role.”

The multinational Upstream, with U.S. operations in California's Silicon Valley, develops smartphone-based marketing campaigns for consumer-products clients.

The campaign manager selection game required would-be employees to navigate seven online “missions” set up to reveal their language fluency, creative thinking, understanding of basic statistics and tolerance for challenge, Krief explains.

The challenge took about an hour and led candidates through a series of problems related to specific aspects of the position they were seeking. They had to “decrypt” anagrams,” answer word usage questions, solve elementary math problems, match customer emotions to hypothetical scenarios and more.

Krief said the game-like format of the job “application” attracted candidates who might not have applied for the job through more traditional means.



It's not too early for the Newark, N.J., office of the Patton Boggs law firm to start planning its annual holiday celebrations—because it throws two separate parties every December.

The first is for the children and guests of staff members, and includes visits from Santa, Mrs. Claus and their many elves. The second party is for employees and their partners, and is held at a local country club.

The abundance of holiday cheer, say execs, is part of an effort to create a family atmosphere and reinforce social ties among staff members. Throughout the year, the firm's employees mingle during monthly cocktail parties.

In addition, Patton Boggs offers employees extra half-days off during the summer and on-the-spot bonuses of up to \$2,000 for jobs well done.

The firm's attorneys are required to complete at least 100 hours of pro bono work each year, and the staff routinely pitches in to help the homeless and hungry in their communities.



Employees of Washington, D.C.-area companies that made *The Washington Post's* inaugural list of the area's top workplaces are apparently very well fed. Amid the medical, vacation and flex benefits cited by employees of the top firms are a huge number of perks involving company-supplied food. *Examples:*

- Digital marketing firm Fishbowl in Alexandria, Va., shuttles its employees to restaurants at lunchtime so they can eat on the D.C. suburb's trendiest street.
- CustomInk, an online clothing designer in Fairfax, Va., has a frozen yogurt machine in the office and serves a "PM Pick-up" snack every afternoon.
- An annual Tech Chef contest at technology and data firm DMI in Bethesda, Md., allows teams of employees to showcase their cooking skills. Winners take home grills.
- Architectural firm Gensler hosts a farmer's market once a month in the summer so employees can buy fresh produce without leaving the office.
- An espresso bar on the first day of work of the New Year welcomed employees of law firm Kelley Drye & Warren back to work.
- Employees of the Share Our Strength food and nutrition charity showcase their baking skills in monthly "Bakolutions" celebrations.



A group of Wisconsin businesses has created a series of videos for grade school and high school teachers to use for teaching practical applications for math on a manufacturer's production line.

The Northeastern Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance includes employers such as KI Furniture, cheese maker Sargento and snow blower manufacturer Ariens.

It aims to change the perception that manufacturing is “dingy, dumbed-down and dead-end,” says Andy Bushmaker, senior HR manager for KI Furniture.

The videos drive home the point that manufacturing employees use skills like trigonometry, software optimization and robotics on the job.

“There's more to manufacturing than pulling levers; there's opportunity for real money and advancement,” says Bushmaker, who notes the manufacturers are recruiting the next generation of employees by partnering with the schools.

“Young people won't be able to capitalize on these opportunities if they don't have the math and technical knowledge these jobs require. We're helping them acquire those skills.”

The alliance also sponsors mentorship opportunities to introduce students to careers in manufacturing. More than 1,000 students have visited KI's plant in the past year for tours and internships.



Employees of Robert Half International gave the business suits off their backs to help others find jobs.

The Menlo Park, Calif.-based staffing company invited its own employees and those of nearby businesses to donate “interview appropriate” clothing and accessories to disadvantaged job-seekers through its “Dress for Success” program.

The 19,000 suits, separates, shoes, scarves and accessories the company collected were distributed to thousands of job candidates who otherwise might not have been able to make good first impressions.

The company started the annual drive in 2002 and through 2015 had collected more than 250,000 pieces of clothing.



Employees of digital marketing firm iProspect play foosball and shoot hoops in between working with clients who hire the firm to boost their online presence.

The Fort Worth organization allows employees to take breaks in a game room, a practice that President Jeremy Confeldt says “brings a unique and casual atmosphere to our office culture.”

Adding to the casual culture: a policy that lets employees wear shorts to work two days a week on hot days. In addition, workers may bring their dogs to work, and they enjoy a monthly “bonding” lunch that allows co-workers to eat together and get to know one another.

Employees earn four weeks of paid vacation after two years on the job, can flex their schedules during the summer and miss any three “optional days” during the year. The organization is closed between Christmas Eve and New Year’s Day.



The Motley Fool tells applicants they are applying for the best job they’ll ever have, touting its flexible work schedules, competitive salaries, employee benefits and friendly work environment. Among the “foolish benefits” offered by the Alexandria, Va., personal finance publisher:

- Unlimited paid vacation and sick leave. The “take what you need” policy assumes employees will get their work done and arrange for absences in advance with bosses. Then they can take “any reasonable amount of time off.”
- 9:30 a.m. start time, although supervisors may approve other schedules. Most Motley Fools work 40 to 50 hours a week.
- An ultra-casual dress code lets staff wear basically anything they want.
- The company provides up to \$5,250 in tuition assistance for employment-related college classes.
- Fool University offers more than 100 classes a year, from computer skills to golf.
- New moms get up to 14 weeks of leave at 100% pay, plus \$200 worth of home-delivered groceries. Dads receive up to five weeks of leave at 100% pay, plus the groceries.



In January of 2014, the Marriott International hotel chain began accepting applications from job-seekers who apply via their cellphones and tablets. The hospitality giant says it is the first in the industry to offer mobile job applications to would-be employees.

“We recognize that the job hunt is changing rapidly,” says David Rodriguez, executive vice-president of HR, who notes that 70% of job-seekers use mobile devices to research job openings.

“We believe that investing in new mobile technology is critical to attracting talent,” Rodriguez says, “especially millennials and those in emerging markets who depend on their mobile devices more than any other generation before them.”

Candidates can use their smartphones and tablets to learn about and apply for jobs at jobs.marriott.com. They may type in their information or import it directly from their LinkedIn profiles. The app is available in six languages.



Sheetz President and CEO Joe Sheetz says the convenience store giant not only tries to offer the same employee benefits as its competitors, but tries to customize perks to suit its young workers, many of whom work relatively few hours.

So even part-timers are eligible for health, dental and vision benefits, as well as for 401(k) matches, employee stock ownership and quarterly bonuses.

Employees of the chain’s 460 stores who achieve milestones can score rewards like a two-day, all-expenses-paid resort retreat. And those who volunteer in their communities could be selected to work on projects with the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Co-workers participate in friendly sandwich-making competitions that can earn them cash prizes and recognition among their peers.



Nestlé Purina Petcare’s employee benefits program offers workers a little help with their own pets.

The pet food maker offers \$200 to any associate who adopts or becomes a pet owner to help defray initial costs. Employees at the firm’s St. Louis headquarters may bring their pets to work with them every day.

The company also offers child- and parent-friendly benefits, including:

- An infant formula program that provides store coupons for any type of Nestlé infant formula
- A program that reimburses staff for some adoption costs.
- On-site day care for children from 6 weeks to 6 years old.

The company also has an on-site medical center that offers yearly health screenings and treatment of minor illnesses.



Execs at Geneca, a Chicago-based custom software development firm, took a cue from the hit TV show “Shark Tank” to encourage its 100 employees to come up with innovative ideas.

The competition—set up like a science fair—is called the “Innovation Challenge/Shark Tank.” Winners receive funding from the company to develop new products, even if their ideas fall outside of their official job duties. The contest’s first winner was a 10-employee team that created an application to recognize employees for exceptional work by permitting them to award each other prizes. The company rolled out the program in the fall.

Geneca execs let the team work on their idea while on the clock, and, in fact, encourage staff to be creative during their 40-hour workweek—and then go home.

The privately owned firm doesn’t base employee bonuses on billable hours, but rather urges employees to work just 40 hours a week and to take all their vacation time.

CEO Joel Basgall says he also encourages employee teams to take on tasks outside their job descriptions. *Example:* When the firm outgrew its office and rented the one next door, a team of computer professionals knocked down the adjoining wall and reconfigured the plumbing.

Result: Nearly zero attrition.



Recruiters at investment advisory firm Andrew Garrett are hoping to attract women financial advisors by telling would-be candidates that “no workaholics need apply.”

In its publicity materials, the Manhattan firm calls itself an “understanding, family-friendly company” that helps female employees succeed by “finding the right balance between profession and parenthood.”

“Unquestionably,” notes CEO Drew Sycoff, “people who are happy at home are happier at work. So here we have no 20-hour days.”

In fact, says Sycoff, employees are encouraged to attend their children’s school plays, parent-teacher conferences and soccer games, and to stay home from work when their kids are sick.



Employees of Boston’s Four Seasons Hotel get employee news via an in-house, co-worker-produced newscast.

Every two weeks, employees put together a 10-minute show that airs on TV sets in staff areas. The broadcasts usually include interviews with employees from a different department each time.

Employees rotate as “anchors” who conduct the interviews as a sales coordinator videotapes. The public relations director writes the script, and other employees edit the tape and insert music.

“Experience News” has featured a hotel chef delivering turkeys to a local food bank, a Haitian doorman recounting a trip to his homeland after the 2010 earthquake there and introductions to each member of the maintenance staff.

There was also a primer on perks the hotel offers its guests—like an ice cream sundae cart that can be ordered via room service.



Houston-based Swift Worldwide Resources gives all of its employees a day off—the same day—to volunteer in their communities. On “Swift Day,” employees at the oil and gas organization’s 23 locations around the world work on teams to volunteer at local charities.

Each team selects its own service project. In Houston, the company’s headquarters city, teams collect donations of clothing and help with clean-up at a charity function for Dress for Success. They prepare meals for Kids Meals Houston, Meals on Wheels and a local food bank.

Recently, Team Calgary spent the landscaping day to help a Franciscan monastery prepare for a festival. In Australia, employees volunteered at a dog refuge, which saves hundreds of neglected and abused pets every year.



The New York-based health insurance company EmblemHealth handed out cash rewards ranging from \$375 to \$750 to more than 1,000 of its 5,000 employees. It rewarded activities like taking online classes, participating in fitness challenges and working with wellness coaches.

The company’s results-oriented “myHealth PATH” program also offered cash rewards for healthy behaviors like having “well visits” with doctors, getting tests and screenings, joining a gym and participating in workplace walks.

Almost two-thirds of the participants claimed the program helped them significantly alter their behavior. In addition, 60% said the program eased their stress levels; 35% said it helped alleviate symptoms of depression.

EmblemHealth officials have said their wellness incentives translate into short- and long-term cost savings, improve retention and help employees adopt healthy lifestyles and feel better.

Dr. William Gillespie, EmblemHealth's chief medical officer, said participants are more likely to complete preventive health screenings like mammograms and take advantage of preventive and outpatient health services.



To attract 3,000 new salaried employees in 2013—800 more than the company anticipated—Ford Motor Co. launched a recruiting campaign that relied heavily on social media.

The campaign, titled, “The Distance Between You and an Amazing Career Has Never Been Shorter,” started the application process on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter instead of through more traditional means, such as mail or telephone.

“The type of talent we want at Ford are often searching for and evaluating potential employers on social media sites, so expanding our recruiting efforts on these channels ensures we have a strong presence throughout their selection process,” said Felicia Fields, Ford’s HR president. Plus, she noted, the focus on social media helped the company portray the “fresh and innovative image that reflects Ford and what we stand for.”

In addition to the social media campaign, Ford also is increasing its recruiting presence on college campuses.



Sociable employees of Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc., (BIPI) never have to eat lunch alone, thanks to a new mobile app that connects co-workers who might otherwise never meet.

After a BIPI social media strategist found himself without anyone to sit with in the company cafeteria in Connecticut, he and a colleague created Lunch Roulette, an app that matches solo lunch-goers with colleagues looking for someone to spend the lunch hour with.

Participants select which days they want company, what time they want to eat and the cafeteria where they'd like to meet. The app matches them with others—they may request one lunch companion or a group—who have signed up and then emails all parties a calendar reminder.

Most of the time, lunch “dates” are between colleagues who have never met.

Within weeks of the app's launch, more than 350 partners had been matched for lunch. BIPI's CEO dined with a young employee from marketing, and the app's creator ate with a database administrator who had some ideas for improving it. Some employees are using the tool to network, so the developers are tweaking the app to allow users to request matches with colleagues from specific departments.

Download it for your own use: BIPI is offering the app free to other organizations. Email info@lunchroulette.us.



Walmart promised in 2013 to hire any honorably discharged veteran for up to a year after he or she leaves active duty.

Through its Veterans Welcome Home Commitment, the retail giant aimed to hire more than 100,000 veterans over five years.

Walmart CEO Bill Simon has said the discount chain is the country's largest private employer of veterans. He wrote to 50 U.S. CEOs to urge them to commit to hiring more veterans.

He called veterans "quick learners and team players and ... leaders with discipline, training and a passion for service."

The Walmart Foundation has committed \$20 million through 2015 to helping veterans and their families transition from the military into the civilian workforce through programs that provide job training, transition support and education.



Domino's Pizza recognizes employees for their best work, even when it's not about pizza. The winner of the international chain's national Delivering More award won it after he dropped the pizza he was about to deliver and jumped into a river to help rescue a drowning man.

The company congratulated the winner, a store manager in Great Britain, for "going above and beyond in [his] commitment to promote the brand." The manager also got a letter from local police, who honored him for saving the drowning man.

Domino's Delivering More award goes to a store or employee who makes a connection with the local community and displays passion and dedication to providing excellent customer service.



Taking a page from Twitter, which limits users to 140 characters per message, Pizza Hut invited applicants for a digital manager position to pitch themselves in just 140 seconds.

Four hours of speed interviews were conducted by Caroline Masullo, Pizza Hut's director of digital and social marketing, who likened the quick pitches to an "elevator speech." She said they revealed how well job candidates could communicate quickly and concisely with consumers who have become accustomed to getting their information that way.

Masullo asked applicants why they should get the job of "manager of digital greatness," and threw in some specific questions that tested their knowledge of social media.



Managers and HR pros aren't the only ones who vet job applicants at grocery chain Whole Foods. Employees weigh in on each new hire as well.

Candidates who are called in for job interviews often face panels of their would-be peers. *Reason:* The organization's execs say the diversity of interviewers during a team Q&A brings all aspects of the responsibilities of the position to the event. Plus, employees can educate the applicant about the job and the organization, helping him or her to make a better decision about whether to accept a job there.

New hires start their jobs with a 30- to 90-day orientation and training process. Afterward, the team leader recommends whether the candidate should be placed on the team, and the team members vote yes or no.



Execs at Denver-based ReadyTalk, a provider of web conferencing and webinar services, are encouraging their workers to get outside more. Employees, including many desk-bound software developers, have access to office bikes for running downtown errands.

Indoors, they can attend twice-a-week yoga classes at the workplace. The company also has an on-site gym and locker room, and offers massage at the office—along with visits from an acupuncturist and a chiropractor. Plus, kitchens are stocked with healthy snacks such as fruits and vegetables.

"Healthy, engaged employees are the key to us sustaining success over time," notes CEO Dan King, who says he looks for employees who "have many passions beyond what they do for ReadyTalk.... We do our best to accommodate people's personal needs so that our employees can bring their best to work every day over the long haul."



After a major merger, Sims Metal Management in Princeton, N.J., polled employees to learn how engaged they were in their work, and got an overwhelming response.

More than 90% of employees of the world's largest metal and recycling company responded to the organization's first-ever employee engagement survey. Execs attribute the impressive showing to these factors:

- The CEO made it clear the survey had his backing.
- The company assured employees that responses would be confidential, and that they would see the survey results—good and bad.
- Management pledged to use the results to make appropriate changes.

The survey found overall employee engagement was 77%, which Sims says is higher than the manufacturing-industry average.



Coal miners, supervisors and mine-safety directors who participated in Massey Energy's football-themed safety contest cut loss-time accidents at the West Virginia coal company by 47% in just one year.

Employees were assigned to “football” teams at their locations and competed with other employee teams for the best safety performance records. Teams won points for each individual member who worked a month without a lost-time accident or a disqualifying absence.

At the end of each quarter, employees on teams with no lost-time accidents became eligible for a prize drawing.

At the end of the year, they could win a grand prize.

Winners could choose their rewards from a catalog that included hunting, fishing and camping items, along with electronics, home appliances and lawn tools.

The program was named the “Raymond Safety Bowl” after a former employee who was legendary for his workplace safety habits.

By the end of the program's first year, Massey Energy experienced its safest year since it opened in 1916. In addition, absenteeism decreased.

The company estimates it reduced the cost of lost-time accidents by \$5 million.



Employees of Mercedes-Benz Financial Services tapped their inner art critics to better understand their co-workers.

In partnership with the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Farmington Hills, Mich.-based company exposed workers to the work of artistic masters from different continents and different centuries in a setting where they could express their views on the artwork—and learn about their colleagues.

In small-group settings, employees were asked what they saw in a piece of art. Someone who offered an observation was pressed for supporting evidence with the question, “What do you see that makes you say that?”

Called “Visual Thinking Strategies,” this open-ended, inquiry-based conversation gave each employee in the room some insight about the intellectual and cultural frames of reference that influenced their colleagues’ points of view.

The sessions used art to help employees build skills in observation and attention to details; communication and understanding; and creative and collaborative problem-solving.

Did you find this report useful? Download more [Free Reports](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/free-reports), at <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/free-reports>.

10 Secrets to an Effective Performance Review: Examples and tips on employee performance evaluation, writing employee reviews, a sample performance review and employee evaluation forms.

Learn how to conduct positive, valuable assessments that lead to maximizing staff performance and helping your employees achieve their professional goals and your organization's objectives. Use Business Management Daily's practical advice for writing employee reviews and conducting performance evaluations. Don't forget to reference our sample performance review and employee evaluation forms for your own staff assessments.

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EffectivePerformanceReview>

Workplace Conflict Resolution: 10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

Learn how to manage employee conflict and improve office communication and team productivity. Disputes between employees are inevitable...left unresolved, they can disrupt your department's productivity, sap morale and even cause some good employees to quit. Learn 6 steps for managing "difficult" employees, what to do when employees resent another's promotion, learn when and how to step in to referee disputes, and much more.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceConflictResolution

Maternity Leave Laws: 7 guidelines on pregnancy discrimination law, state maternity regulations, pregnancy disability leave, plus a sample maternity leave policy

It's important to know what you must do—and what you can't do (or say)—under federal anti-discrimination and maternity leave laws. And it's vital to double-check state maternity leave statutes, which may provide more liberal leave benefits. While no federal law requires you to provide paid maternity leave, most employers must comply with the pregnancy discrimination law and FMLA maternity leave regulations. Here are 7 guidelines on how best to comply with maternity leave laws, plus a sample leave policy you can adapt for your own organization.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MaternityLeaveLaws

The Office Organizer: 10 tips on file organizing, clutter control, document management, business shredding policy, record retention guidelines and how to organize office emails

Learn how to keep your office operations running smoothly—and ward off chaos and legal trouble—with practical document management techniques for administrative professionals, office managers and HR professionals.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeOrganizer

Best-Practices Leadership: Team management tips and fun team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale

Learn new team management tips and team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale. Take our leadership assessment exercise to gauge your own performance as a team manager. See how businesses of all sizes are getting creative with team-building icebreakers and activities. Fight off team complacency with 5 strategies for making team-building exercises part of your daily routine.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement

Employment Background Check Guidelines: Complying with the Fair Credit Reporting Act, conducting credit background checks and running a criminal check to avoid negligent-hiring lawsuits

Employment Background Check Guidelines shows employers and HR professionals how to properly conduct reference/background checks, select third-party background firms and why screening candidates online on social networking sites is legally risky business. Don't allow your organization to risk being held liable for "negligent hiring" or "failure to warn" should an employee turn violent on the job.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines

Salary Negotiating 101: 7 secrets to boosting career earnings, negotiating a raise and striking the best deal in a job offer negotiation

Think you deserve a raise, but are afraid to walk into your boss's office and ask? Don't let ineffective negotiation skills hold you back. Employees at all levels can boost their career earnings by following the rules on negotiating a raise, hashing out the best pay package in a job offer negotiation and knowing their market value.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101

FMLA Intermittent Leave: 5 guidelines to managing intermittent leave and curbing leave abuse under the new FMLA regulations

One of the biggest employer complaints about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the productivity problems caused by employees' use—and abuse—of FMLA intermittent leave. The problem: Employees with chronic health problems often take FMLA leave in short increments of an hour or less. The Department of Labor took steps to help minimize workplace disruptions due to unscheduled FMLA absences by saying that, in most cases, employees who take FMLA intermittent leave must follow their employers' call-in procedures for reporting an absence. Amend your organization's policies, update your employee handbook and revisit how you track FMLA intermittent leave with these 5 guidelines.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/FMLAIntermittentLeave

Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes

Employers, beware: The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division reports that wage-and-hour labor litigation continues to increase exponentially. Federal class actions brought under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) outnumber all other types of private class actions in employment-related cases. Use this special report, Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes, to review your overtime pay policy and double-check your FLSA exempt employees' status. Expecting a visit from a DOL auditor? Get prepared by taking the self-audit at the end of this report.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OvertimeLaborLaw

Office Communication Toolkit: 10 tips for managers on active listening skills, motivating employees, workplace productivity, employee retention strategies and change management techniques

A manager's job is 100 times easier and more rewarding when his or her employees are performing like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a manager's job becomes exponentially harder. The best managers are the best listeners ... listen to our 10 tips and maximize office communication skills and bolster workplace productivity.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeCommunicationToolkit

Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit: HR advice, guidelines and policies to keep your workplace safe

Unfortunately, in the wake of a spate of workplace shootings, HR professionals and managers nationwide must consider the horrific possibility of violence erupting at their own facilities and events. To help employers prevent tragedy, this toolkit offers business advice, guidelines and policies aimed at keeping workplaces safe from employee violence. Learn prevention strategies, tips on identifying potentially violent workers, managerial advice on maintaining a safe workplace. It includes two sample anti-violence policies, adaptable for use in any company, plus checklists to use in case violence erupts.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention

14 Tips on Business Etiquette: Setting a professional tone with co-workers, clients and customers

For organizations and employees alike, recognizing the critical link between business protocol and profit is key to your success. Learn how to confidently interact with colleagues in ways that make you and your whole organization shine. Discover best practices on making proper introductions; cubicle etiquette; “casual dress” rules; handshake protocol; guest etiquette; workplace behavior faux pas; business dining etiquette, office wedding invites and other co-worker special occasions; business letter and email protocol—and even how your office decorations may affect your professional image.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101

12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and employee rewards

If you've had to cut pay and staff and now expect more from those who remain, it's vital to revamp your employee recognition and rewards program. Employers can double their rewards and recognition efforts in innovative, cost-efficient ways with employee-of-the-month awards, employee incentive pay, employee appreciation luncheons, more time off, shopping sprees, wellness incentive contests, plus employee rewards customized to motivate Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and the Matures. Now is the time to get clever with your employee recognition programs. This report shows you how with great ideas offered up from our [Business Management Daily](#) readers.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram

The Bully Boss Strikes Again! How to deal with bosses who make crazy requests

And you thought your boss was unreasonable? Bet he never asked you to perform oral surgery or fill in for the bomb squad. Talk about “other duties as assigned!” Even if your direct supervisor swamps you with petty tasks and doesn't appreciate all you do, you can always “manage up” to make sure the boss's boss knows your worth. This report includes practical advice on how to manage a toxic boss along with dozens of outrageous stories about bully bosses.

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BullyBoss>

Microsoft Email: Outlook Tips & Training: How to improve productivity by effectively employing under-used features already at your fingertips

We all use Outlook. It's easy. You can answer email, keep your appointments and your calendar, and save your files in various folders. But are you using it to manage your entire workflow? You can. Melissa P. Esquibel combines her 25+ years of experience in information technology with a background in training, technical writing and business risk analysis to move beyond email and help you understand Outlook's amazing workflow benefits. You'll discover how to get more out of Outlook than you ever dreamed possible with this hands-on road map to Outlook that can send your productivity skyrocketing.

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MicrosoftEmailOutlook>

17 Team Building Ideas: The team building kit for managers with team building exercises, activities and games to build winning teams today!

With employees still reeling from workplace budget cuts, now's a great time for new team building ideas. No, you don't need an expensive round of paintball to gain the benefits of team building exercises, but you do need to squeeze the most out of them. This report provides teamwork examples, exercises and tips for leading winning teams. Go from being a manager who oversees people to a leader who molds them into winning teams with these 17 team building ideas.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TeamBuildingIdeas

10 Time Management Tips: A how-to guide on efficiently managing your time through effective delegating, calendar management and using productivity tools

In this era of downsizing and the quest for efficiency, businesses of all sizes are asking employees to take on extra tasks to boost productivity. Has your job turned into one of those "stretch jobs"? If so, you may be looking for a better way to get more done in less time, reduce stress and stop burning the midnight oil. Read about calendar management, keyboard shortcuts, running productive meetings, setting up agenda templates and using tech tools for project management with these 10 time management tips. Learn to prioritize your tasks and stop working in a crisis mode all the time

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TimeManagementTips

About Business Management Daily

Business Management Daily is a free news website of the Capitol Information Group, providing sound news and advice since 1937.

At Business Management Daily, we're driven to help organizations and individuals succeed. That's why we deliver plain-English, actionable advice to high-performers at over 80,000 companies of all sizes across hundreds of different industries.

Our [Free Email Newsletters](#), [Print Newsletters](#), [Free Special Reports](#) and [Webinars, Podcasts, Audio Conferences & CDs](#) help provide business professionals with the news, skills and strategies they need to grow their business, avoid legal pitfalls and advance their careers.

Our [editorial team](#) includes experienced managers, leaders, HR professionals, lawyers, administrative professionals, CPAs, strategists and business owners from a wide variety of industries.

A Promise to Our Readers

To help you advance your career or business, we will:

- Provide expert advice that is accurate, intelligent and timely
- Save you time by making that advice concise, actionable and available in your preferred format
- Guarantee 100% satisfaction with customer service that exceeds your expectations

Visit us at: www.BusinessManagementDaily.com