The Ultimate Guide to
**Showing Year-Round
Employee Appreciation**

Content

# Employee Appreciation: Your Essential Employee Retention Strategy

Showing your employees year-round appreciation with rewards, incentives and other forms of motivation is a proven way to boost employee engagement and retention. In fact, Blackhawk Network (BHN) reported that **83% of employees say that receiving rewards and recognition would have a positive impact on their productivity and loyalty.**[1]

This ebook will cover all the ways in which employee appreciation can boost morale, increase retention and attract top talent. We've also put together a myriad of ideas to suit every company's size and budget, catering to the diverse needs of today's employees—so every employee feels the love. From what matters to Gen Z workers—*soon to make up almost 30% of the workforce*[2]—to implementing incentives all year-long, you'll find everything you need to know about employee appreciation inside our ultimate guide.
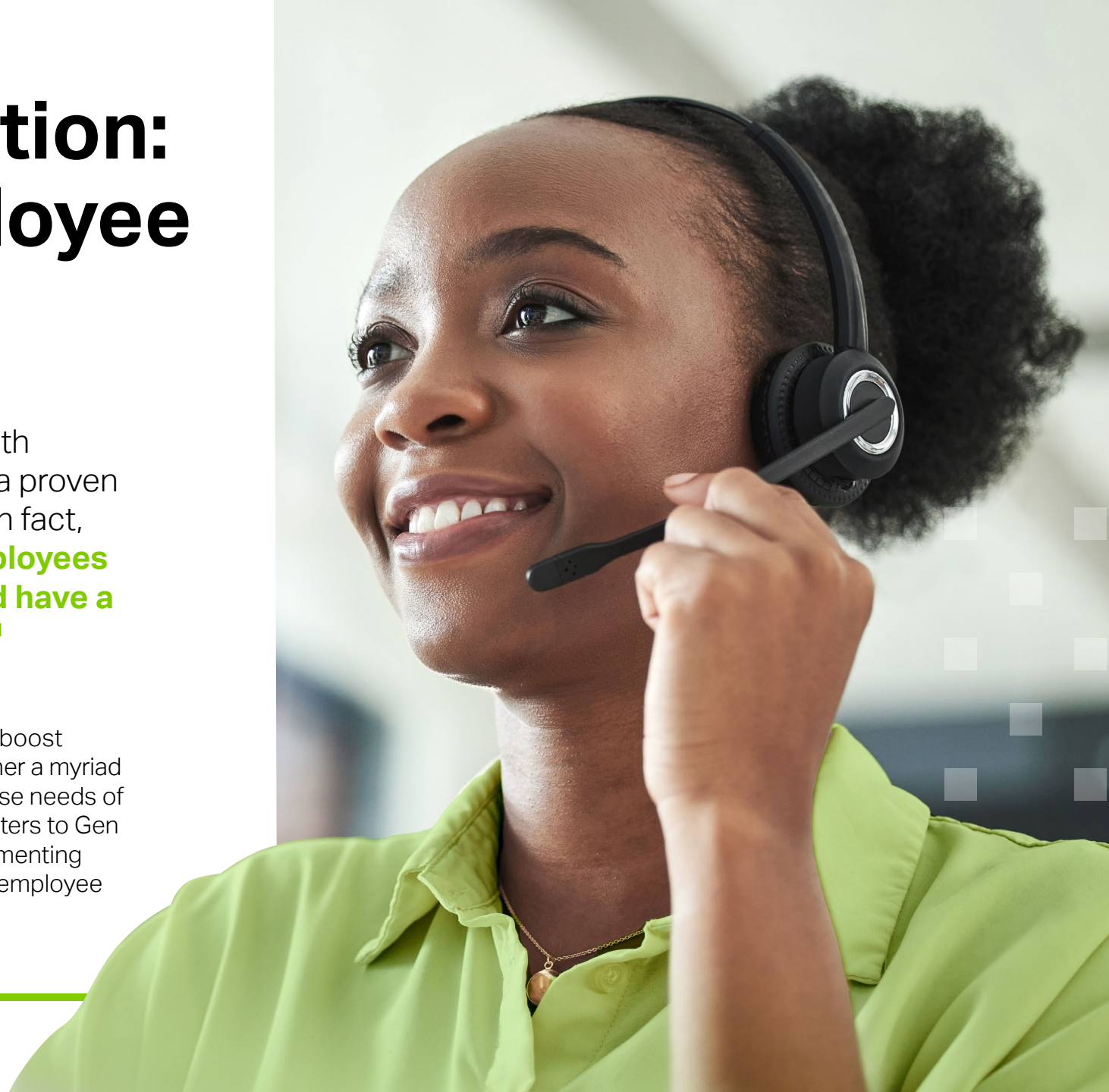
The business impact of employee appreciation

What's the secret ingredient for happier, more motivated employees?

It's simple: show them some **appreciation**.

But we're not talking about the obvious holiday bonus or cake on birthdays; retaining and attracting top talent takes year-round recognition. The problem is that there's evidence to suggest many companies aren't quite hitting the mark when celebrating their employees—especially amidst growing inflation and rising costs of living.

Over half (52%) agree their company is a bad gifter[3]

The thing is, if you appreciate your employees, they'll do more for you too. And the stats in this area speak for themselves:

- **90%** of employees state it's important to receive recognition[4]

- **77%** of employees also want to recognize others for their positive contributions[5]

And it's clear that employees could use some more love right now. In fact, **Nearly a quarter of U.S. employees are burned out at work.[6]**

We recognize there's pressure to control costs, but deciding not to reward employees now is likely to have greater costs down the line. From reduced productivity, the cost of employee recruitment, downtime during the hiring and training process, and the loss of valuable corporate knowledge, deciding not to proactively reward your employees is clearly a costly decision.

Save recruitment costs with year-round employee appreciation

Quiet Quitting, the Great Resignation or the Great Quit. Whichever term you use, it's clear that the cost of living crisis, burnout and preferences for remote work continues to make turnover a costly business concern. Once you factor in the time and effort involved with recruiting and training new candidates, it's no surprise that replacing and hiring an employee equates to 6 to 9 months of their annual salary.[7]

Many employees now want—and expect—to work from home at least part of the time. In fact, our 2023 Employee Appreciation Study uncovered that **35% of hybrid employees and 50% of remote employees would seek a new job if they had to work full-time in an office**.

Overall, **nearly 9 in 10 employees have concerns about their employment. 38% state they have been asked to do more without a pay increase and 36% report feeling concerned about their mental health and well-being.**

And there's evidence to suggest younger workers are being hit the hardest.

According to Deloitte's research, **the cost of living is now Gen Z's biggest concern—overtaking climate change.**[8]

"**35%** of employees would seek new employment for better rewards and recognition."

Many would go as far as to look for another job that offered better perks than speak-up. Our 2022 Employee Appreciation study found that 35% of employees would seek new employment for better rewards and recognition.[9] Bottom-line: employees want to be recognized year-round, not just on major days like holidays or birthdays. This is particularly pertinent for remote workers, who may be more prone to feeling isolated.

With all this in mind, it's so important to be proactive with employee appreciation—instead of reactive when it's likely too late.

The good news is there's *plenty* you can do to show them you care before it gets to that.

Defining your recognition and rewards strategy

It's no secret that a good working culture is the key to a successful business. In fact, research suggests that the likelihood of job turnover at an organization with a **positive company culture** is just 14%.[10] The thing is, a buzzing culture can be hard enough to create in person—let alone remotely. A first-rate employee recognition and reward program can help build a culture of appreciation that shows employees they *are* valued. In turn, this results in huge dividends when it comes to feelings of belonging, connection and trust in the workplace.

An employee recognition program is the perfect way to reward employees for their hard work, achievements and contributions. Ideal for showing your appreciation, employee recognition and reward programs aim to boost employee morale, motivation and job satisfaction. And the good thing is there's no one way to do it. Each organization is different and so building your program will depend on a variety of factors. e.g. your business goals, industry, company size, budget, demographic, etc.

Sounds like a lot? Don't worry. To help you get started—or, to enhance what you've already got in place—we've put together this handy **4-step guide to building a successful employee rewards program.**

Step 1:
Who's responsible
for recognition?

It's simple: *everyone* within an organization is responsible
for recognizing each other's efforts and achievements—
from new employees to the senior leadership team. That's
how you build a culture of belonging and respect. Genuine
appreciation can go a long way in boosting your employees'
engagement—something that's even more important
when you're working together from afar. So whether it's
through chat, over the phone or a reason to get together in
person, find an excuse to say "thanks" and encourage your
employees at every level to adopt this culture.

Most importantly, senior leadership and management are
critical to a recognition and reward program's success.
To optimize your results, ensure the right stakeholders are
brought in, bought in—and leading by example.

Step 2:
What to recognize employees for

The thing is, each employee will work in their own way and have their unique style of working. But as long as the recognition is meaningful and relevant to each individual employee, taking into account their own skills, strengths and interests, you'll be on the right track. What's more, a mix of both individual and team recognition is also effective in promoting collaboration and a positive work environment.

There are so many things you can recognize your employees for, from hitting targets to going above and beyond.

Check out our favorite top 10 ideas:

1 Exceeding performance targets and goals

2 Providing exceptional customer service

3 Innovative thinking and problem-solving

4 Going above and beyond job expectations

5 Demonstrating teamwork and collaboration

6 Consistently meeting or exceeding job responsibilities

7 Demonstrating leadership and initiative

8 Taking on additional responsibilities and tasks

9 Fostering a positive work environment

10 Attaining certifications or additional training and development

Step 3:
How to recognize employees

You could try performance-based bonuses, awards for exceptional work (e.g. MVP of the month), or even a donation to an employee's chosen charity. Whatever you choose, these programs are perfect for showing employees how much you care—increasing employee happiness and retention. So whether you're together, hybrid or fully remote, you can still recognize the efforts of every employee—wherever they are.

Shine a spotlight on remote employees

Zoom fatigue, loneliness and a general lack of engagement are all problems that today's virtual teams face. But despite the distance, it doesn't mean you can't brighten up someone's day. Our research revealed that **74% of employees working from home said it was important to receive rewards from their company to stay motivated.**[11]

The power of incentives can also be used to motivate remote employees to return to the office. In exchange for hunkering down on their commute, employees want the following rewards[12]:

47% Money
32% Payment for gas/transportation to the office
32% Paid time off
26% Paid time to commute to the office
25% The option to work virtually sometimes

Employees agree: health is wealth

Though money is clearly the top contender for motivating employees to return to the office or remain loyal to their company, engagement truly goes beyond cold hard cash.

In fact, many people would seek out a company or remain loyal to a company that lines up with their values. To get started, here are a few ideas reported directly from employees:

Focus on work/life balance

Employees want work to fit into their lives, not the other way around. Whether it's shutting down early on Fridays or offering employees the option to work virtually sometimes, there are lots of ways you can make those work-time hours a little more manageable.

Enhance engagement with a four-day work week

We found that 36% of employees would be loyal to their company if offered a four-day work week.[13] Effects of this new working model have been abundantly positive. In fact, one UK study reported that after reducing employees' working hours, company revenue increased after six months.[14] If giving Fridays off isn't an option, consider allowing employees to take time off in a lump sum periodically throughout the year.

Gift paid time off

From mental health days to giving extra days off in the summer, it's clear that employees will appreciate this one. 28% of employees in our study reported they are more likely to stay with a company that offers more paid time off[15]—and return refreshed as a result.

Give benefits to manage inflation

Though many companies may not be able to afford to give high enough raises to compete with inflation, there are other ways to offset the rising cost of living. Consider offering to help cover commute costs or provide incentives for employees to adopt healthier lifestyle habits, which in turn can help reduce your organization's healthcare premiums.

Give them an experience they'll never forget

Gifting your employees an experience that removes them from their working environment can work wonders for their self-care and well-being. BHN has a range of **original gift cards** you can't find anywhere else, like Spafinder wellness reward cards and Pack and Go travel cards. You pick the price point and your recipients can enjoy at a time that works for them.

Looking to reward them with something more personal? There's nothing more rewarding than this:

Adopt a personal touch

Thoughtful gifts can come in all shapes and sizes. Why not try a shout-out in a team meeting or a personalized playlist? You could even draft a handwritten note to say thanks. But that's not the only way you can celebrate your staff's individual personality, character and skills.

Give them the gift of choice with gift cards

With BHN's range of **gift cards**, it's easier than ever to deliver those little moments of magic that make work special for your employees. That's because it allows them to choose from hundreds of gift card options, offering a huge amount of choice. And many of our reward options allow you to add your own message for that personal touch. In fact, this gift makes the perfect surprise as many of these cards can be sent either to their mobile device or directly to their door.…

81% of employees say that receiving a reward from an employer encourages them to work harder[16]

Step 4:
When to recognize employees

We believe that you can make moments of appreciation at any time throughout the year—there's no hard and fast rule here. However, there's one thing that's more important than anything else:

Don't wait until December

Sure, the end of the year is the traditional **time for gifting**. But that doesn't mean you have to wait until December to show your employees how much you appreciate them. If times are looking particularly tough with the rising cost of food and gas bills, why not surprise them with that bonus a little early? There's no time like the present to show them you've got their backs.

Lookout for these key dates

Giving recognition all year-long is easy because there's an abundance of days to give out rewards. Check out our **Inspirations to Give Calendar** for some key dates to add to your diary as a reminder to say "thanks."

Give on-the-spot recognition for on-the-spot joy

Giving rewards should be a seamless experience, both for the giver and the recipient. To make rewards truly unexpected, consider giving rewards live in a team or all-hands meeting via a spot rewards platform, like **Microsoft Teams**.

Don't forget to ask for employee feedback

There's no better way to gauge employee satisfaction than by asking them. It allows you to take any constructive feedback and work it into your rewards program going forward. You might not get it right the first time, so don't worry. But the fact you're listening and happy to go the extra mile? That means the world.

Creating moments of appreciation

Need additional inspiration?
Here are some more ideas for
showing year-round appreciation

Reward good behavior

An employee engagement program that rewards your employees for contributing to the company values is an effective way to help build a strong and positive culture. Whether it's awards and bonuses or prizes for employee of the month, you'll start to see a positive ripple effect in both your individual teams and across the entire organization.

Celebrate milestones

Whether it's to welcome a new employee or to honor a workplace anniversary, acknowledging individual employees' personal milestones within your company helps show they are valued and an integral part of the team.

Remember employee birthdays

An oldie but a goodie, year-round employee appreciation should still include employees' birthdays. This doesn't have to involve an embarrassing gathering around the desk, though—especially if teams work remotely. And if it's not possible to get together in person, you can still send a cake to their house or a personalized gift card.

Celebrate employee achievements

There are lots of great ways you can do this, like by reinforcing intrinsic rewards. These are psychological rewards that employees receive upon completing work to a high standard of performance.

Employees that are intrinsically motivated often gain satisfaction from completing a project, finishing a course or developing a new skill. To further encourage this behavior, celebrate their wins with a shout-out in a team meeting or via the company newsletter. You could also recognize employees for high customer satisfaction, community involvement or work anniversaries. But what about those staff members who *haven't* been around for quite so long?

Motivate with a career-based reward

There's plenty of research to suggest that employees who have access to professional development opportunities feel happier and more fulfilled at work. In fact, **one study** revealed 90% of employees agreed or strongly agreed that training and development programs improved their job performance.[17] So, keep employees satisfied and provide a personal development budget to help their careers flourish. Not only does it show employees they're appreciated, but it's an investment in your business as well.

Key Takeaways

Today, showing employees appreciation is more important than ever. It's clear that staff are facing a plethora of challenges—from rising costs of living to remote isolation and disengagement. But in the face of it all, with the lines between work and life becoming increasingly blurred, they're still committed to their roles—and dedicated to your organization.

At BHN, we believe this level of commitment deserves **year-round** appreciation—not just a shout-out at the year's end or on the odd anniversary.

The thing is, boosting morale with rewards doesn't just benefit employees. It creates higher levels of job satisfaction, thriving workplace cultures, greater year-round performance and increased rates of retention. In turn, this can help you accumulate massive savings in the long run by not having to hire and train new employees. That makes recognition one incentive that's well worth investing in.

The reality is that times have changed rapidly over the past few years. So why not look into *new* ways of rewarding and recognizing your staff too?

Surprise your staff with meaningful moments throughout the year, and you'll get plenty back in return. When it comes to recognition, a little year-round appreciation goes a long way.

BHN

Looking to show employees you appreciate them?

Call us at **866.353.4877** to see how you can create meaningful moments from a choice of rewards.

About BHN

BHN delivers branded payment solutions through prepaid products, technologies and networks that connect brands and people. We collaborate with our partners to innovate, translating market trends in branded payments to increase reach, loyalty and revenue.

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