

15 Expert Tips to Make Every Day Employee Appreciation Day

By George Dickson

Have you marked your calendar yet? [Employee Appreciation Day](#) is observed every year on the first Friday in March. It's a day when companies across the world take time to express appreciation for their employees.

Some buy lunch for employees, while others throw parties or give out awards. A few might even give their team the day off! So how do you know the time, effort, and other resources you're putting into recognizing employees are well spent?

Good Intentions, Limited Effects

Employee Appreciation Day dates back to 1995. Bob Nelson, a founding board member of Recognition Professional International, created the holiday with his publishing company Workman Publishing.

Over the past 20 years, many other companies have embraced the unofficial holiday. However, a problem presents itself when an organization limits employee appreciation to that one day.

An annual employee recognition celebration may feel like the right thing to do, especially as Employee Appreciation Day draws near, but to truly appreciate your employees, you'll need to go further.

Nelson himself explained the problematic nature of this approach in an [interview with Business Insider](#):

"I'm a big advocate of using recognition on a daily basis," Nelson tells Business Insider. "By no means is Employee Appreciation Day meant to be this *one* day to thank people or this *one* day

to bring in doughnuts," he explains. "But I did want to have one day where we could call attention to the topic and have conversations about its importance."

Celebrating your employees only once per year:

- Rewards everyone collectively, regardless of their individual contributions.
- Occurs too infrequently to be much of a motivational tool.
- Can come across as insincere, especially if there's minimal appreciation the rest of the year.

So what's the solution?

Make Every Day Employee Appreciation Day



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Easier said than done? Not really.

To help get the ball rolling, we built a list of easy ways to recognize employees on a regular basis, along with quotes from organizations with recognition-rich cultures:

1. Celebrate diverse wins, results, and contributions

Have you ever noticed the same superstars getting all of the recognition? Are rewards tied to sales or years of service? As deserving as your top producers and [senior employees](#) may be, your other employees are contributing to the company's success, too.

While one employee may have landed a big new account, another may have reduced the company's exposure to risk, and yet another may have recently completed an intense training program. Look for and celebrate "wins" of all kinds both publicly and privately.

2. Encourage peer recognition



Encouraging peer recognition is an effective way to ensure that your employees feel recognized and appreciated for their contributions. Instead of an annual, top-down approach, [peer recognition programs](#) like [Bonusly](#) empower employees to recognize and reward one another on a much more frequent basis.

Crowdsourcing employee recognition makes celebrating the myriad achievements and contributions of all the members of your team much easier, more organic, more genuine, and much more realistic to accomplish.

Although peer recognition is one of the most effective methods to ensure employees know they're appreciated, there are many complimentary initiatives you can implement that dovetail nicely with it.

3. Host Lunch and Learns



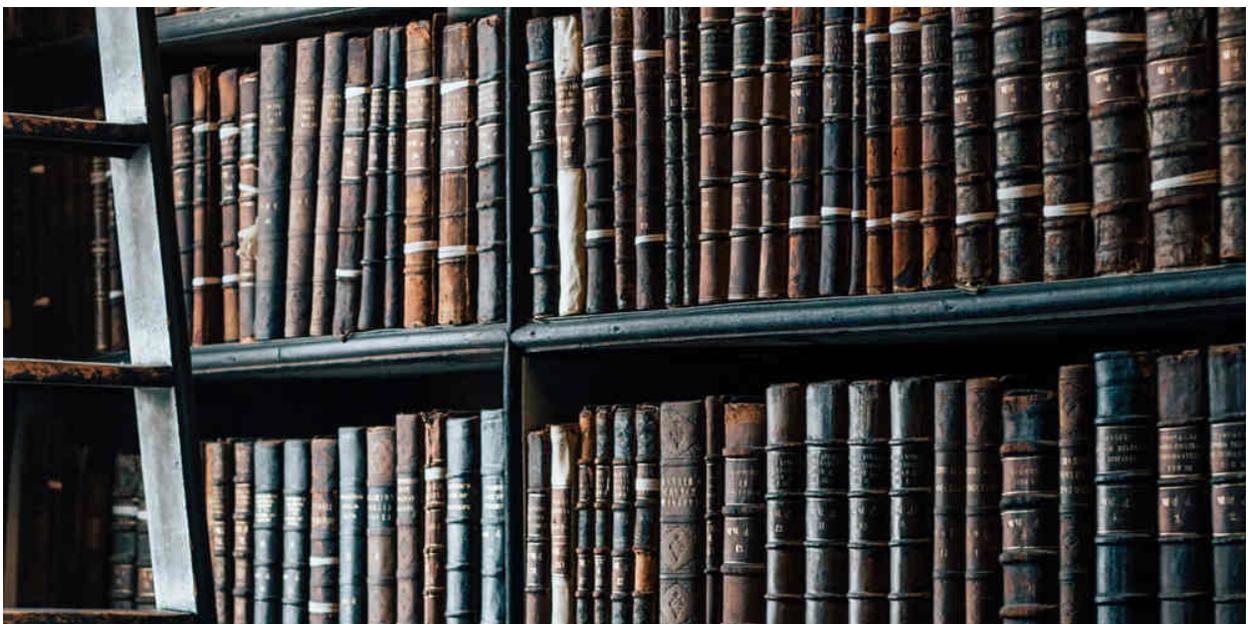
Each of your employees has a list of unique talents. Some of those talents may still be hidden. Take the initiative, pick up lunch for the team, and organize a half-hour event to learn from each other.

Perhaps someone from the team is a bicycle enthusiast in their spare time and would be willing to teach a quick seminar on basic spring bike tune-ups.

The talent pool isn't limited to members of your team. There are other experts you can bring in to share their expertise. For example, if you don't have a bike expert on staff, check in with a few local bike shops and see if any of their techs are willing to give a half-hour lesson. They'll get a great opportunity for exposure, and your team gets some expert instruction.

What would your team like to learn about or share? Use your creativity, and solicit feedback from the team on what they'd like to hear about.

4. Offer professional development



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A first step toward this could be something simple, like providing a monthly allowance for education and development. Modern educational tools like [Lynda](#) and [Udemy](#) make this simple and cost effective. Think about setting up a stipend for relevant conferences or training.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that investing in your team's education is simply grooming them for their next position at another company. By supporting their professional development, you're showing the team how much you value their current skills, and the things they bring to the table. Your investment also shows your interest in seeing them grow with you over the long term.

Peter Baeklund has a great quote on the topic:

A CFO asks a CEO: What happens if we invest in developing our people and then they leave us?

The CEO responds: What happens if we don't and they stay?

5. Furnish great (or at least functional) equipment



It's hard to say you appreciate your team if they're using outdated, barely functional equipment.

You don't have to spring for the most expensive tools, but it's important to ask your employees if there's anything you can provide that would make their job easier. It could be a more ergonomic tool, a new web service, or anything, really.

No, you don't need a Porsche when a golf cart will do the job, but the important thing is to keep an open line of communication about the needs of your team.

6. Prioritize personal outreach

It takes just a few minutes of your time, and is an incredibly powerful way to help employees feel appreciated. There are a lot of great tools and techniques out there to help make this happen on a mass scale, but it's important to remember to personally thank your teammates for the work they do.

7. Provide open communication channels

Andrew Schrader, HR manager at Chobani, shared one way that he and his team communicate appreciation:

“Our employees wanted frequent recognition, and the program empowers them to recognize each other. Having the ability to recognize someone immediately is the most valuable part of [Bonusly](#). Whether you have 20 employees or 2,000, it doesn’t matter. People just want to be told they’re doing a good job.”

[SnackNation](#)'s Emil Shour shared two great examples of what he and the SnackNation team do to make sure the team feels like every day is employee appreciation day. The first is '**Crush-It Calls**,' and the second is '**Shout-outs**.'

8. Crush-It Calls



“We know that a lack of appreciation is the [#1 reason why Americans quit their jobs](#), so creating a culture where recognition and praise are abundant has been ingrained into SnackNation from day 1. On a weekly basis, we host what we call the Crush-It Call. Each Friday afternoon, the entire team huddles together and we go around the room answering 2 things:

- A coworker you want to 'crush' (i.e. praise) for something awesome they did the past week
- 1 thing you're grateful for

I love the Crush-It Call because everyone on the team a chance to see all the cool things happening in each department. As SnackNation has grown, each department has become a little more compartmentalized and we often miss all the valuable things our coworkers are accomplishing.

We actually filmed one of our recent Crush-It Calls. If you want to see what it looks like so you can replicate it at your company, [check it out here.](#)”

9. Shout-Outs

“As for a daily practice, we encourage people to give shout-outs to the team when it's deserved. You'll often see emails like this going out to the whole team:



Kevin Dorsey <[redacted]>

10/1/15 ☆



to SnackNation ▾

Hey Guys,

Just wanted to send a quick note, and say well done and congratulations!

We exceeded the team monthly goal for September and I hope you all feel very proud!

It was truly a team effort across the board and that is very fun to see.

Plus, having unlimited healthy snacks to fuel our team is something that makes us all feel very appreciated on a daily basis!”

[Blueboard](#)'s Morgan Chaney shared three very creative and fun ways she and her team appreciate each other: **team events**, **homemade lunches**, and **pleasant surprises**.

10. Team Events

“In the spirit of eating our own dog food, each month we set aside budget (about \$100/per person) to do a fun team event together in the spirit of our mission (challenge your comfort zones, indulge in your passions, or experience new things). Everyone on the team alternates picking the monthly activity, and is encouraged to pick something that's personal to them, so it's a fun way for the team member to share something they love with the rest of the group. I planned our January event and took the team out to do Block Print-making, which represented my love of drawing/being creative. Last month we took capoeira classes from a teammate who really loves fitness and Brazilian culture.”

11. Homemade Lunches

“A lot of the people on our team love cooking, and we have a full kitchen at the office, so we've recently had people volunteer to cook lunch for the team (Blueboard reimburses for groceries). It's a fun way to get everyone together over a home-cooked meal, and help celebrate some of the really talented chefs in our group. My coworker Arianna made these amazing scallops with beurre blanc sauce two weeks ago (she's at another level), and this week another coworker made his 'famous' breakfast tacos for everyone.”

12. Pleasant Surprises

“It's not every day or organized, but we have a lot of love for our team (especially since we're still growing at just ~15 employees), so a few weeks ago we surprised and desk-bombed our Concierge Lead (who was having an insanely packed plate) with really fun desk decorations and uplifting gifts, champagne, and a signed card from everyone on the team thanking her for all her hard work. Here's a photo!”

Jennifer Riggins of [Happy Melly](#) and [Management 3.0](#) shared two simple ways you can keep the appreciation flowing all throughout the year, and make yours stand out:**specificity** and **visibility**.

13. Specificity

“We are all running a mile a minute at work, so we lose track of communication, and then when we do take time to talk, we focus on the negative. Yes, we need to talk about ways we can improve, but we also need to be appreciative more. And to do it in a specific way, not just a

'Thanks for everything' type of message, but compliment your coworkers and recognize them for doing something special.”

14. Visibility

“A lot of companies make saying thank you a visible practice. Virgin calls them Rippas, some call them hugs, at Management 3.0, we call them [Kudos](#). You can put up a bulletin board to publicly post your employee recognition or you can take the time to celebrate these little thank you notes once a week or once a month. And it doesn't have to be just for those in the office. You can show anyone a remote thanks on Twitter with [Kudobox.co](#).”

Wellness



You don't need to install nap pods or provide free yoga lessons (though you could), but it's important to let your team know your organization values their health, both on and off the job. That dedication to employee health is valuable both on an individual and group basis.

In a recent interview with us, [Button's Stephen Milbank explained](#) why employee health is so important, and how something as simple as your attendance policy can have a surprisingly large impact:

“We have a pretty open policy where you can take those days off and not put other people at risk. By doing stuff like that, you allow people to be more responsible. They are going to act on the side of caution, which is ultimately better for the organization.”

Wellness isn't just about physical health either. Make sure the team isn't saddled with assignments keeping them from occasionally unplugging from work. That recuperative time is crucial to their performance, their stress levels, and ultimately their retention. In the same interview, Milbank shared some more great advice on this topic as well:

“If you're creating an environment where someone is never able to go home and relax -- where they work all sorts of crazy hours -- the other people in their lives are going to be unhappy.”

Looking out for the health of your team isn't just valuable as an expression of employee appreciation, it has clear bottom line benefits.

Putting it all Together

This final tip is crucial: putting all the right strategies together into a sustainable practice that fits your company culture.

[When I Work](#)'s Rob Wormley shared how he and the When I Work team expertly combine several of these techniques into one cohesive strategy:

“At When I Work, we celebrate and show appreciation to our employees in a number of ways. First, we give them the tools and resources they need to be successful in their roles. We've found that this ultimately has a positive impact on employee happiness and retention. Second, we give employees the opportunity to continue learning by sending them to conferences and buying books that they want to read. Third, we plan fun monthly and quarterly company and team outings in an effort to thank our employees for their hard work. Finally, we stock our kitchen with free food and drinks to keep employees energized and happy throughout the day.”

Did this year's Employee Appreciation Day catch you off guard? Use these tips to make every day Employee Appreciation Day, and you'll never have to worry about the first Friday in March sneaking up on you again.

Download Our New eBook:

*Getting the Most from
Peer Recognition*



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George is dedicated to strengthening organizational cultures with thoughtful leadership and frequent recognition. George formerly managed content and community at Bonusly.