

55 Creative Employee Reward Ideas (2019 Update)

By George Dickson

Employee rewards are an essential component of effective employee engagement strategies, but many leaders still struggle to implement them successfully. By aligning the rewards you offer with your team's values, you can positively influence how they're received.

If providing excellent rewards seems like a challenge, don't worry: we've got you covered with a comprehensive list of creative reward ideas your staff will love.

In fact, this list has been so popular that we've updated and expanded it multiple times! (Look out for the new ideas peppered throughout this post — they're all marked with a ✨ for your convenience.)

Employee rewards don't have to be large or costly; in many cases, small rewards are impactful because they can be given more frequently, and frequency is crucial to successful [employee recognition and rewards programs](#). Creativity, not cost, is the real secret to building an assortment of employee rewards that everyone will be excited to earn.

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If creativity isn't your strong suit, don't worry.

More than anything, rewards need to [mean something](#) to the employees receiving them.

To oil the gears, we've assembled this comprehensive list of creative employee reward ideas and organized it by category so you can find what you need. Think of this list as a foundation for developing your own outstanding catalog of creative employee rewards.

COMPANY-SPECIFIC

**PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

LOCAL FAVORITES

TIME OFF

CASH EQUIVALENT

TRAVEL

TEAM BUILDING

HEALTH +
WELLNESS

COMPANY-SPECIFIC

What are some rewards that only you can give to your employees? Company-specific rewards are among the most unique employee rewards you can provide. If you're not offering them, you're missing a great opportunity.

Before we go any further here: make sure your company-branded gear is cool and useful so people actually value it. Many companies have personalized pens and the like, but you can be more creative than that, right?

If it feels like junk or looks cheap, it's not going to be a particularly enticing reward — worse, it can even reflect poorly on your [employer brand](#). It doesn't take a huge mental leap to equate the apparent value of a reward with the value placed on the contributions that earned it.

Company-branded rewards are most effective when the gear is tasteful, useful, and high quality. It can be especially fun when there's a limited quantity available. For example:



1. T-shirts

We have a limited-edition early employee t-shirt that everyone covets for its unrivaled softness and awesome design featuring the Brooklyn Bridge. Over a year later, I still wear mine and smile about the early days every time I put it on.

A few other possibilities include the following items:

- 2. Coffee mugs**
- 3. Water bottles**
- 4. Notebooks**

Although those can be great options, an even better approach would be to match those items to the team's culture.

If there are a lot of outdoor enthusiasts on your team, consider something like a daypack. If there's a large contingent of golfers among you, consider something useful for hitting the links. You can get almost anything branded or personalized.

Still not sure what kind of gear you should be considering? Poll your team and pick from the most popular suggestions. Better yet, get them involved!

5. Swag design ✨

Get your employees involved in designing your new company swag, whether it's a wall calendar featuring the dogs of your office or a t-shirt featuring an alternative company mascot. Handing the creative reins to your employees can inspire new collaborative dynamics, give them a sense of ownership, and imbue the final product with more meaning.

6. Lunch with the president/CEO/leader

You might be surprised how many employees would love a chance to sit down and break bread with the leader of the organization. If your employees want to get to know you better, why not give them a chance in an informal, relaxed setting?

7. Master classes

Do you have a senior employee willing to share some of their highly valuable skills or insights? Provide an incentive for them to hold a master class and fund it through your rewards program.

You might also have a virtuoso or hobbyist on your team that would be willing to teach a class on their area of expertise in return for picking up the tab for lunch. We recently held some great Lunch and Learns on topics like "Listening with Empathy" and "Google Analytics."

8. Dogs at the office

If your office circumstances permit, pets at work can be a great way to improve morale across the entire team. It's a good idea to check with everyone before rolling out something like this though — not everyone is keen on sharing their workspace with pets.

9. VIP parking

Unless you're based in a city like NYC, almost every office has that one parking spot that

everyone covets. If your office has designated parking, reserving the very best spot to celebrate a teammate can be a great reward.

10. DJ for the day

If you have music playing in your office and there's not already a mandatory soundtrack, consider offering the ability to choose the music for the day as a reward for employees.

It costs nothing, can boost morale, and presents the opportunity for members of the team to share a bit about themselves. Who knows, you might even discover your new favorite song.

11. Sock Club subscription ✨

When you subscribe to [Sock Club](#), you get a new pair of socks every month. Buy a subscription for your company and gift each month's pair to a different employee who embodies the spirit of your company values. They'll have warm feet and feel stylish, with the added plus of remembering your token of recognition every time they do laundry.

12. Art ✨

"Research by Exeter University's School of Psychology found that employees who have control over the design and layout of their workspace are not only happier and healthier — they're also up to 32 percent more productive," [reports Forbes' Karen Higginbottom](#). What's more, a Cass Business School study found that "54 percent of women acknowledged that art has a moderate to big effect on their creativity at the office (47 percent of men) and 80 percent of the women agreed that art at the office could reduce their stress-levels (66 percent of men)."

Invite your employees to select new artwork for your office space. Give them a budget and designate a wall space, then see what they propose!

13. DIY trophies ✨

Items from the dollar store, a glue gun, and metallic spray paint are all you need to make outrageous [custom trophies](#) for your employees. Whether the awards are goofy, like "Best

Excuse for Coming in Late,” or sweet, like “Always Willing to Help Out,” the trophies themselves are tokens of appreciation that can be passed around the office as frequently as you’d like.

14. Balloon bouquets ✨

Is one of your employees returning to work after parental leave? Let them know you’re happy to have them back by filling their desk with balloons! Did your sales team just reach a huge milestone? Deliver an Instagram-worthy bouquet of balloons to celebrate. Whatever the occasion, balloon bouquets are a fun and visible way to show your appreciation.

15. Handwritten thank you notes ✨

Handwritten thank you notes are a classic medium for sharing appreciation. In the five or ten minutes it takes to write a thank you note by hand, you can make a regular habit of reflecting on your employees’ contributions.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Most employees want to get better at what they do. [Mastery is one of three key motivators](#) Dan Pink mentions in his book [Drive](#).

Professional development benefits employees and the organization. For that reason, it can be an incredibly valuable reward.

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Here are some examples:

16. Books

As an employer, you can provide the materials an employee needs to improve their mastery over a subject. Find out what kinds of books and other educational resources might be valuable to your team. Audiobooks and eBooks are also a great option since they're delivered digitally, which makes fulfilling them easy.

17. Office resource library ✨

An investment in your employees' professional development is an invaluable reward. Offer to cover the cost of a book they've been wanting and add it to your office's resource library. Personalized book plates to recognize each person and their reason for adding a book could be a nice touch, but you don't have to go overboard. Supporting your employees and owning your role in their development as they build their personal skillsets is a generous and symbolic gesture.

18. Courses

There are countless courses that employees can enroll in to improve their skills and gain certifications. Consider curating a list of online courses you can provide subsidized or free access to.

19. Seminars

Seminars are a great way to absorb a large amount of information, meet people, and expand

skill sets. This is an employee reward that offers major benefits to the organization as well, as employees gain valuable skills that can be applied on the job.

20. Memberships

There are some excellent online services out there that can help people learn new skills for free. Many of those services offer paid memberships with added benefits and expanded catalogs and functionality.

21. Conferences

Conferences can be expensive to attend, but they're often fun, and a great place to learn about the latest best practices, and build valuable relationships. Subsidizing or covering the cost of a trip to a conference can be a great reward for employees who has show extra initiative and interest.

22. Hackathon ✨

Pair up developers and non-developers and [host a hackathon](#). Even if your company isn't building a digital product, you can host a hackathon for your employees. "[B]reaking out of the day-to-day routine can reinvigorate and inspire staff, but hackathons also demonstrate to employees that innovation is not only welcomed but also expected," write Elizabeth Spaulding and Greg Caimi in a 2016 [Harvard Business Review article](#). Plan an event that employees will look forward to and recall all year round.

23. LinkedIn recommendations ✨

This idea, which we love, comes from our friends at [SnackNation](#). Go public with recognition, and reward exemplary contributions with a glowing recommendation on LinkedIn. Since the process of asking for recommendations can be lengthy and uncomfortable, your unprompted words of approval will speak volumes.

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LOCAL FAVORITES



There are some rewards that you can provide to your team that are only available in your location. These are great rewards to offer because they are unique, and often favorites of people in the area.

24. Local restaurants

Every city has a list of favorite local establishments, and many of them sell gift cards. Think of a few cherished local spots you can add to your list of rewards.

25. Concert tickets

Local events are another great, custom-tailored reward you can offer your team. Are there any events coming to town that you know your team would be excited to attend? Those would be some excellent rewards for a job well done.

26. Local attractions

It doesn't matter where you're located, there are always local attractions. Maybe there's a great ski area nearby, a golf course, or a boat ride. Take advantage of the unique things your area has to offer.

27. Museum membership ✨

Reward your employees and support nonprofit institutions with a corporate museum membership. Employees can bring their families and go multiple times a year. The reward that keeps on giving!

28. Work from elsewhere ✨

Support local businesses and treat your employees to a working day outside the office. If your team likes rock climbing, for instance, you can get day passes to a rock climbing gym that offers wifi and lounge areas. You can host active team-building activities and productive creative sessions all under the same roof. (We like [Movement](#) here in Boulder, CO; [Brooklyn Boulders](#) has locations in New York, Chicago, and Boston).

TIME OFF



Time is a priceless resource, and it's one thing you can never get back. Why not offer some to your team as a reward for great work? Even if you absolutely love your job, a little extra free time is always welcome.

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29. Long lunch

An extra long, relaxed lunch can set a zen-like tone for the rest of the day, even when the extra time spent is relatively small.

30. Early release

Think back to your school days, and remember the utter joy of "early release day." This is especially appealing during the spring and summer months, when the weather is great, and an extra hour can feel like a half-day off. Just one extra hour can make enough time for activities you'd otherwise miss out on.

31. Sleep-in day

Have you ever woken to an alarm in the early morning hours — sunlight barely peeking through

the curtains and the world just beginning to hum — wishing that you could indulge in that moment just a little longer?

Providing the option to enjoy that time could be a great way to reward an employee's contributions. As an added bonus, it might help eliminate grouchy behavior.

32. Extra PTO hours

You could also consider extra PTO hours as a reward. This gives employees the autonomy to save up extra hours of PTO for a half, or even a full day.

33. Work from home day

If you have the infrastructure to support it, a work from home day is a great reward that provides the autonomy and [flexibility](#) so frequently cited as a crucial differentiator for employers competing in the modern talent landscape.

In many cases, eliminating the commute can make for an exceptionally productive day. Everybody wins.

34. House cleaning

You don't always need to give employees time away from the office to give them the gift of time. Consider offering vouchers for a house cleaning as a reward. It will give them back the precious time they would have spent cleaning.

35. Laundry service

If you're located in a city where laundromats are a way of life, this is just another example of an easy way to give time back to your team.

CASH-EQUIVALENT



Sometimes the easiest way to pick the right reward is to let the recipient choose it.

36. Gift cards

There's a special feeling you get when you buy a pair of new shoes, a spa day, or a cup of coffee on the weekend and know your company just treated you to it. There's no doubt a huge variety of gift cards from your team's favorite retailers that you can offer.

37. Charitable giving

Many of your employees are likely making charitable donations already. You can help them to amplify the impact they're making by giving them an option to [make charitable donations as a reward](#) for great work on the job.

TRAVEL



It's a goal of many influential leaders to help their team get where they want to be in life. Offering travel as a reward for great work can make that easier.

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38. Travel subsidy

You don't have to send your team on a tropical vacation to get some mileage out of this reward, and there are some great ways you can approach it to maximize the benefits.

If you have multiple locations or remote employees, you can offer a travel subsidy for employees traveling to any of those locations. Their travel doesn't even have to be work related — simply ask your employee to make it to at least one team lunch or happy hour while they're there. Travel subsidies can provide a nice incentive to take a trip and help strengthen bonds across your team.

39. Transit vouchers

Depending on your location, getting to and from work can be a challenge, and in some cases, expensive. If it's not already mandatory in your city to offer transit assistance to employees, subsidizing their commute costs is a great way to eliminate the daily stress associated with getting to and from work.

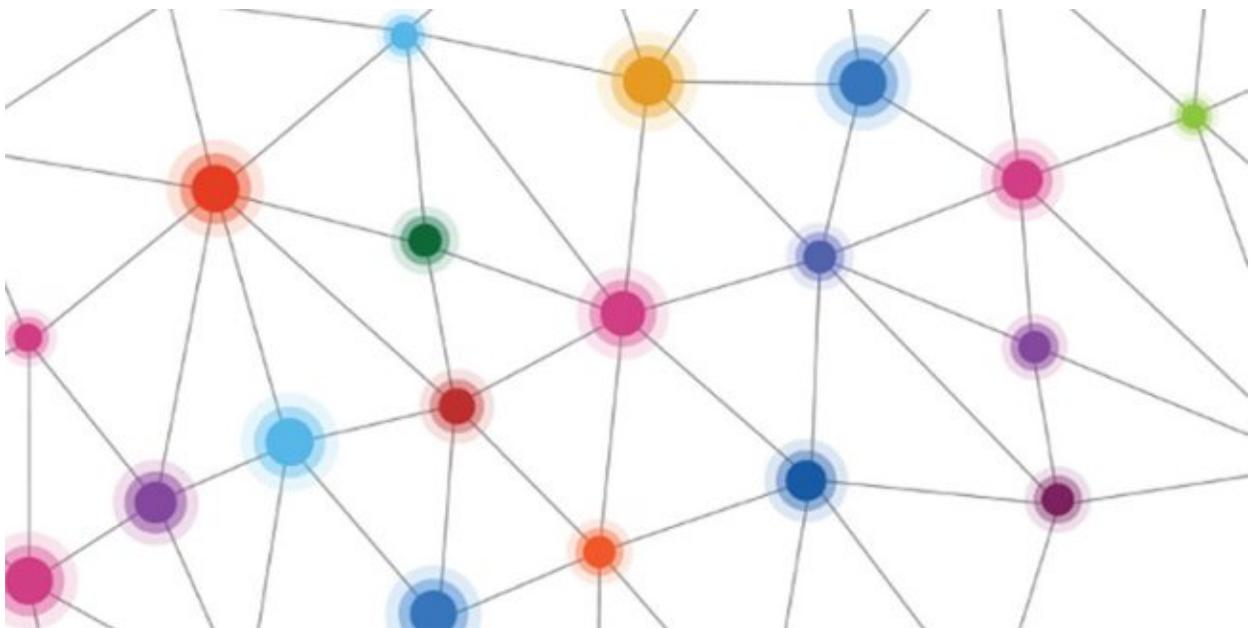
40. Car rental upgrade

Are you already offering a car rental stipend for employees during [work trips](#)? Consider offering a car rental upgrade as a reward for a big contribution.

41. RemoteYear ✨

[RemoteYear](#) brings together groups of inspiring professionals to travel, live, and work in different cities around the world for a year or four months. For some of your employees, your support for RemoteYear could be the ultimate reward. (Individuals must apply and be accepted to the program.)

TEAM-BUILDING



Employee rewards don't have to be given on an individual basis. There are a bunch of rewards you can offer to help [inspire stronger bonds between coworkers](#), which is an incredibly valuable asset for both them and the organization as a whole.

42. Happy hour

Happy hours are a great way to get everyone together outside of the office in a more neutral and relaxed setting. It doesn't necessarily have to be at a bar, or include alcohol — the real goal here is to provide an environment that gives everyone an opportunity to kick off their shoes and get to know each other better.

43. Travel

If you have more than one office, offering employees opportunities to spend time working in a different office is a great way to break the monotony of the daily routine, while still getting great work done. It's also a nice way for employees who may never have met face-to-face to forge valuable friendships.

44. Team lunch

It's always great to break bread with the team. It gives everyone time to enjoy each other's company in a different environment and a different context. If cost is an issue, there are a lot of creative ways to keep it affordable — even if it's simply a bag lunch day in a nice, alternate setting.

45. Mini golf ✨

Take your team out for a round of putt-putt and find out who has the best handicap. Mini golf is easy to get the hang of, so you can engage people who have never played or haven't played in ages.

46. Team movie outing ✨

Keeping an ear to the ground and knowing what your employees are interested in can spark creative rewards ideas. One Bonusly employee's open invite in Slack to go see *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* became a company outing when our CEO (admittedly, a huge Star Wars fan) offered to

have the company cover the tickets. Sharing your interests with your team and socializing outside the office can go a long way towards [building trust](#) and camaraderie.

47. Personalized stickers, mugs, or magnets ✨

Surprise your employees with stickers, mugs, or magnets printed with their faces or their dogs' faces! Great for decorating laptops, drinking coffee, or playing on the kitchen fridge, these personalized items are like [custom Slack emoji](#) for the physical world. ([Sticker Mule](#) has excellent die cut and kiss cut stickers for this kind of project.)

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HEALTH + WELLNESS



Healthy employees are often more productive, according to [research shared by the University of Warwick](#). Rewards that can improve employee health can benefit everyone.

48. Bike share

At Bonusly, our NYC-based employees can select a yearlong CitiBike bike share membership available as a reward. This is a great reward because it touches both health and transit. If you're not based in a city with a bike share program, there are likely some similar services to take advantage of.

49. Bike maintenance ✨

Make a one-time investment in a bike pump, Allen wrench set, and screwdrivers to keep on hand for employees who commute by bike. You'll be supporting their active and environmentally-friendly transportation choices and helping them stay safe on the road. Alternatively, you can cover the cost of an annual tune up, which usually includes brake pad replacements and truing the wheels of the bike.

50. Gym membership

A gym membership is a great way to help employees maintain their physical health, especially in the winter months when it's harder to get active outside.

There's no guarantee that a gym membership is something everyone will take advantage of, but that's okay. Those who are interested will greatly appreciate it, and those who aren't will have plenty of other options. Part of building a great catalog of employee rewards is keeping it broad enough to appeal to the wide variety of people on your team.

51. Personal training vouchers

It's in an employer's best interest to help their employees [achieve their goals](#), whether that means operating at the top of their professional field or getting in tip-top shape. If members of your team show interest in this type of reward, it's a great way to help them achieve their personal goals.

52. Meditation breaks

Some call it mindfulness, some meditation — no matter the name, it can be great to take a few moments to step back and reset. Meditation's potential upsides are strong and there's very little a company needs to sacrifice in order to put something like this in place. Just a few minutes a day can make all the difference.

53. Yoga classes

Yoga can help improve fitness of both the body and mind. Offering yoga classes to employees can be a great reward since the practice can help them feel focused at the start of the day or unwind after a hard day's work.

54. A new plant ✨

According to [US News & World Report](#), British and Dutch researchers have “found that having office plants created a better work environment.” How is that?

“One possible explanation is that greenery increases engagement by making people more physically, cognitively and emotionally involved in their jobs.” If your employees would consider it a gift and not a burden, give them a plant to care for at the office.

55. On-site massages or facials ✨

Ten minute massages to relieve neck and shoulder strain could mean a lot to your team. If this kind of reward is cost-prohibitive, see if your local massage therapy school will bring a teaching clinic to your office.

Next steps

This list is only the beginning. There are some other [great resources available](#) that you might find helpful, too. We hope you'll use these guides to start thinking about the unique and creative ways you can reward your employees so that they feel genuinely valued.

If you're ready to take the next step in your journey to building a more engaged team, download a free copy of our latest guide:

How to Recognize Employees the Right Way

Watch the webinar

presented by  **Bonusly** + **Namely** 

Written by George Dickson



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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.