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Learn the secret to showing appreciation

Your employees know you appreciate them. After all, you tie bonuses to results so they'll be rewarded for their efforts. That's great—but it's not appreciation. It's gratuity.

Anyone who's eaten in a restaurant knows a *gratuity* is something given in return for service—such as pay for performance. *Appreciation*, on the other hand, is a deeper recognition of value. When you give bonuses, perks, even public recognition for a job well done, you are dispensing gratuities—an important way to motivate good performance. But showing appreciation requires a different approach. Here are some pointers:

- **Think about the effort, not just the results.** When you reward results, give thought to what employees had to do in order to achieve those results. What did the employee have to sacrifice, learn, forgive, embrace to reach the goal?
- **Be specific in expressing your appreciation.** Usually award ceremonies focus on what was accomplished rather than how. Take time to thank employees for the nights they stayed late, the crazed client they struggled to soothe, the school play they missed. Thank them for putting up with your bad temper and management's indecisiveness. Let them know you really understand what it took to achieve the results that are being rewarded.
- **Don't let workers deflect your praise.** Few people would blush at being offered a raise, promotion, or bonus. But it's not uncommon for workers to become embarrassed when being praised for their character traits or sacrifices. Be firm in expressing your appreciation even if employees try to wave you off.
- **Ask workers to share the story of their success.** One reason managers neglect to appreciate employee efforts is they don't really know what employees endure to reach their goals. Give workers an opportunity to share their experiences by prompting them for details. You may be surprised to learn that even minor successes require major sacrifices.
- **Offer to lend a helping hand.** Once you're aware of a worker's extraordinary effort, ask if there's anything you can do to make these tasks less difficult in the future. Appreciation can also be defined as "showing empathy." When you not only thank workers for the hardships they've endured, but also commit to ease their load, that's a true display of appreciation.

—Adapted from "Retaining talented employees," by Russ Giles, on the Allies Consulting Web site