

What are some tips for expressing gratitude to employees?

A key to reinforcing excellent behavior is to show appreciation. Saying “Thanks!” may seem less hard-nosed than other aspects of leadership, but it can have a dramatic impact on morale, culture, and behavior. Instead of badgering low performers, we should spend more of our valuable time honoring high achievers. If you want employees to work harder and do something different to improve the patient experience, you’ve got to reward them when they do. Find any excuse to recognize progress!

The gift of gratitude does not need fancy wrapping paper; it simply needs to be timely, genuine, and personalized. There are many creative ways of showing gratitude that require little work, but can have a lasting impact. A few include:

Old fashioned, hand-written thank you notes: Taking the time to put down on paper exactly what someone did and how much you appreciate their efforts leaves the recipient with a tangible reminder of why they are special.

Emails to supervisors: Thanking the individual is important, but you can take the gratitude to the next level by sharing your appreciation with that individual’s supervisor.

Stopping, and sincerely saying “Thank you”: Take a couple of seconds to provide verbal recognition, e.g., “I want to thank you for being so easy to work with this week. I know we’ve been short-staffed and I really appreciate how you’ve stepped up to handle the extra work with such a positive attitude.”

Surprise treat: Imagine the impact of leaving an energy bar on an individual’s desk with the note, “Thanks for powering through today!”

Organizational kitsch: Most organizations have nearly endless supplies of branded pens and notepads. Contact your marketing department and see what they have available for you to provide to your employees when expressing gratitude.

Gratitude lists: Departmental or organizational gratitude lists can be posted in a locker room or to a hospital’s intranet. Anyone on the team could publicly express gratitude. A nurse might write, “I am thankful Sherri took time out of her busy schedule to help a patient who had locked her keys in her car.” Or a pharmacy intern might post, “I am thankful for Jerry’s willingness to answer ALL of my questions. He’s so helpful!” Everyone likes to see their name in print.



Senior leadership standing ovations: One creative way for senior leaders to publicly recognize an employee who did something special is to give her a surprise standing ovation. Suddenly appearing at a person's office or by their side, bursting into applause for a few seconds, and explaining why it is that they have taken time to come down and personally say thank you is an easy and touching way to express gratitude.

Thank you post-it collage: Covering someone's office door (or computer monitor, or desk chair, etc.) one morning with notes like, "Thank you for working so hard with facilities to get us new lights!" "We appreciate your hard work!" "Thanks for being committed to the project!" and "You're a great listener!" is a simple, but powerful way to show appreciation.

Expressing gratitude is an inexpensive and simple way of showing appreciation. Saying "thank you" engages someone to continue his or her excellent behavior and inspires others to do the same.

