

**Gifts for Employee Appreciation**

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Gifts are exchanged on many occasions for various different reasons. Along with holidays and special events, gifts are also very commonly shared as tokens of appreciation. They are commonly shared between employers and employees, family and friends, parents and children, patients and doctors, and students and teachers, etc. The use of gifts for such occasions serves as a symbolic representation of the appreciation and emotions we experience for the services provided in the relationship.

Many different factors play a role in the types of gifts we select for others. The gifts we give and the way we extend our gratitude and appreciation vary depending on the relationship we share with the other individual and their beliefs. In professional or work-related settings, having an understanding of your employee's values has a major role in how you conduct your business, and the satisfaction they might have from working with you. Giveaways and gifts for employee recognition are important to let your employees know how they are doing, if their work is appreciated and to what extent. As noted by White and George (2022), understanding your employees and the differences among them is crucial for the effective functioning and flow of your organization.

### **Understanding the Two Types of Gifts: *Tangible vs. Intangible Gifts***

Tangible gifts are physical objects that can be used or touched, whereas intangible gifts are gifts that are not physical and cannot be purchased. For example, a tangible gift can be food, toys and other objects, whereas an intangible gift can be a gift you give someone as an experience, such as the gift of spending time with someone. Tangible gifts are also known as material gifts, and intangible gifts can also be referred to as experiential gifts, associated by a shared experience with another individual. Studies on mental health show that experiential gifts are more appreciated and are better at improving mental health compared to material gifts (Balconi et al., 2019). Experiential gifts go one step further after the gift exchange and allow you to spend quality time with your giftee. These gifts are known to

increase satisfaction, and increase the bonds between the gift giver and the gift receiver (Balconi et al., 2019). These are especially important in professional work settings as they build trust between the employer and employee.

Experiential gifts in work relationships are important as they allow the employer to get a better understanding of the employee who is working for them and vice versa. It is crucial for a business or employer to invest time into gifting their employee whether it is material or experiential, tangible or intangible. Gifting your employee to make them feel appreciated will ultimately allow the company to grow by increasing satisfaction for the company, its employees and customers. Making employees feel appreciated will in turn positively affect the entire business outlook by giving employees further motivation to come into work, which can then be reflected in the quality of work they produce for the company.

There are many different forms of tangible gifts that can be given to employees. These can include many different items such as gift cards, paid time off of work, bonuses, written appreciation letters, personal gifts, food, better treatment, flexible working hours, company merch, or even donations. A study by White and Hamrick (2019) explored which types of tangible gifts were most desired amongst employees of different workplaces. The study examined the demographic differences that may influence an employees preference for tangible gifts and the types of gifts that were most valued and appreciated amongst employees. A total of 500 respondents chose what their most valued language of appreciation is (White and Hamrick, 2019). Participants chose their most desired tangible gifts from both lists and open-ended responses (White and Hamrick, 2019). The frequency of results were broken down into four categories based on desired gifts (White and Hamrick, 2019). Food was a very commonly desired gift in acts of personal appreciation, and gift cards were most desired overall (White and Hamrick, 2019). Many employees also chose time off of work,

and were very interested in experience-related gifts such as being treated better at work or attending special events (White and Hamrick, 2019).

### **Gift-Giving and Appreciation**

Understanding your employees and age group differences for gift and appreciation preferences can positively impact your business in areas such as customer service, satisfaction and ratings, profits, and reduced staff turnover. The study by White and George (2022) found differences among the preferences for gift appreciation among different age groups through online assessments. The study found that younger and older age groups valued quality time as gifts compared to employees in their 30s (White and George, 2022). Furthermore, older employees possessed a very low desire for any tangible gifts (White and George, 2022). Findings from the study by White and Hamrick (2019) suggest that again, older employees have a less likelihood of choosing tangible gifts compared to younger employees. Not only do older employees not prefer tangible gifts, but they appreciate tangible gifts the least amongst other forms of gifts. Results also varied between individuals based on their work setting. Individuals who worked with the government had lower desires for gifts, while individuals who worked remotely in long distance work relationships had a higher desire for gifts and appreciation.

### ***The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace***

If not tangible gifts, what is the most appropriate and reasonable gift an employer can give their employees? There are five languages of appreciation, i.e. methods or gifts that an employer can give their employees to recognize the dedication and commitment they put into their work everyday (White, 2017). An employer can extend gratitude for their employees by (1) providing them with words of affirmation, (2) spending quality time with them, (3) providing them with an act of service, (4) buying them a tangible gift, or (5) providing appropriate physical touch such as high-fives (White, 2017).

### **Employee Appreciation During Covid**

Remote jobs have also been becoming increasingly common since the pandemic. During these tough times, how exactly should an employer express their appreciation to long distance employees without the use of tangible gifts? There are many ways employees can extend their gratitude towards their employees using simple gifts. The gift of words, language and quality time, or in other words, intangible gifts go a long way in providing comfort, satisfaction and contentment for working at the company (White, 2015). In both domestic and international cases, words of appreciation, a simple conversation, and spending quality time with your employee can do the trick (White, 2015).

However, which method is actually preferred by employees? Across different age groups and work settings, the general consensus among the best gifting methods for employees in remote settings found that remote workers preferred to spend more quality time as their language of appreciation compared to on-site colleagues (White, 2021). In both remote and on-site work positions, there was appreciation value for tangible gifts (White, 2021). During the dramatic shift in online employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote employees chose words of affirmations and acts of service less often compared to on-site employees (White, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Gifts for employee recognition and appreciation are important to reinforce a positive workplace and work as a great motivation for employees. Both tangible and intangible gifts can have an effect on boosting motivation for employees; however, tangible gifts are actually the least desired language of appreciation amongst employees. When it comes to tangible gifts, gifts that take into account the employees personal preferences are most appreciated and recognized by the employee. The perfect gift for anyone lies in not only the thought,

dedication, and love put into the gift, however, it lies in the time, and the experiences that the giftee shares with the gift-giver.

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