

Compliments of Your Technical Communication Experts at Freund Associates

This issue marks the 5th year that we've published

Ask Dr. Freund. We would like our readers to consider this free newsletter one small way of saying "thanks" for your support over the years. As we hurtle into the holiday season, no doubt all of us will have opportunities to offer gifts of thanks and appreciation to employees, colleagues, co-workers, customers, and potential customers. But gift giving can also be fraught with potential pitfalls if the message behind the gift is not communicated in a proper and businesslike way. Here, then, are some guidelines and the answers to some questions that will make your holiday gift-giving season as rewarding as possible.



Thank You

Question 1:

I want to thank my employees for the work they have done throughout the year, but some have done more than others and deserve extra recognition. How do I communicate my appreciation appropriately?

A: Over the years, our company has identified five distinct levels of appreciation, which, more often than not, are tied to monetary limits. Those levels are as follows: (1) A "Thank You" from the president or owner of a company. This can take three different forms, which are described in the answer to the next question. (2) Promotional items, such as a mug, a ball cap, or anything else with the company logo on it. (3) A voucher, gift card, or gift certificate that can be used at the recipient's discretion. (4) Gifts of candy, flowers, fruit, wine, and related items. (5) Awards, trophies, and plaques, which are usually reserved for the highest level of thanks, sometimes in combination with the other gifts mentioned here.

Question 2:

As the owner and president of my company, I understand how important it is to say "thanks" to my employees for a job well done, but sometimes a pat on the back just isn't enough. Could you please suggest some other ways I could communicate my appreciation?

A: First, there is the generic "Thank You," which can be presented in a personal letter that describes what the recipient's contribution has meant to the company. While costing virtually nothing to produce and deliver, this simple gesture of thanks can go a long way towards building morale and inspiring future above-average work performance. A little recognition truly can go a long way! The second way a chief can say thanks is with a certificate of appreciation. This document can be inexpensively created via any number of popular software programs. Once printed, the certificate can be framed and presented to an employee for display in his or her office. The certificate will be a daily reminder of an outstanding performance and can serve as a constant source of pride. The third way to communicate appreciation is by public acknowledgement, such as an article in the company newsletter, a press release in the local paper, or an announcement in a business journal. Recognition and acceptance by one's peers can have powerful effects on an employee's performance and can be done at little or no cost, making these three "thank yous" one of the best investments a company can make in its employees.



Question 3:

I realize the importance of thanking my employees with inexpensive tokens of recognition, but these only go so far. How do I take my appreciation to the next level?

A: True, after an employee receives a few letters of recognition or certificates without a higher level of reward (such as a raise or a promotion) the “warm fuzzy” from receiving yet another letter of “thanks for a job well done” may be perceived as patronizing and considerably less sincere than earlier letters. Too many appreciations of this kind also diminish the “specialness” of the gesture. It may be time to consider a promotional item. Examples can include a personalized and engraved business card holder, a pen and pencil set, or a quality letter opener, each adorned with the company logo. Yes, promotional gifts will require a monetary investment — \$10 to \$25 per gift is the norm — which can be less if items are purchased in quantity, but they can help your employees feel more appreciated.

Question 4:

I don't believe that another promotional item with the company logo on it is going to express the thanks I feel is warranted. Any other options?

A: Yes, consider giving items of monetary value that an employee can use in a more personalized way, such as vouchers, gift cards, or gift certificates to local restaurants and entertainment venues. You can count on spending more for these gifts, anywhere from \$25 to \$50; however, you can be confident that you are expressing your thanks at level commensurate with your intentions and the employee's performance. And like any gift or reward, unless you are tying it to something like personal sales goals or total company revenues, giving too much reduces the uniqueness of the gesture.

Question 5:

I remember the days when our company gave fruit baskets and bottles of scotch to customers as holiday gifts. I may be old-fashioned, but does anyone give candy, flowers, or alcohol anymore?

A: Absolutely. A billion dollar industry is built upon it. But candy, flowers, and alcohol are very generic and can be considered less than personal for recognizing an exceptional employee performance. Assorted chocolates, a fruit basket, or a bottle of wine are often given to customers and colleagues around holiday time as a way of expressing thanks for business or services provided throughout the year. These gifts are usually costly enough — again, between \$25 and \$50 is the norm — to give as a token of appreciation and thanks, but inexpensive enough NOT to represent a possible conflict of interest. Many companies now have policies regarding the dollar amount of gifts they will either give or accept from colleagues and customers, lest these actions be perceived as “influential.” Gifts to policymakers and politicians notwithstanding, the insurance and securities industries are just two examples where anything more than the \$25 to \$50 spent on candy, flowers, or alcohol may be perceived as being influential.

Question 6:

When does someone deserve to receive a trophy or a plaque?

A: These awards are often reserved for persons whose efforts are well above and beyond what is usually expected of them. Rarely given to an employee as a holiday gift or token of thanks for a job well done, these expressions of gratitude are reserved for board members, community leaders, members of not-for profit organizations, and in some cases, retirement gifts. A quality trophy or plaque may cost between \$50 and \$100 or more, but the recipient is likely to have contributed many times this amount in terms of time, effort, or talent and is not necessarily seeking concrete gifts or monetary rewards for the work performed. The recipient will be honored by the award, and the good will generated by your gesture will surely be worth the relatively small investment.