

6 Tips

to keep your team motivated

It's no surprise that employees in the nonprofit sector are generally paid less than their contemporaries in the private and public sectors. While we'd like to believe the sector's employees are equally motivated by salary as they are by the organization's mission and impact on the community, the most recent voluntary and nonprofit labour force study released by the HR Council for the Voluntary and Non-Profit Sector indicates that we are losing a key group of young, talented and innovative leaders to sectors better equipped to offer not only more enticing financial rewards, but also greater potential for career learning, growth and opportunity. The HR Council also sites that only 29% of nonprofits took steps beyond salary increases to improve their work environment.

For many nonprofit organizations already feeling pressure from tightened budgets and shrinking donations, the option to invest significant resources in retaining this group of future leaders just doesn't seem feasible. However, creative use of personalized non-monetary rewards can go a long way towards helping to build feelings of confidence and satisfaction and to improve employee retention and performance. We'd like to share 6 ideas that can be inexpensive to provide, and priceless to receive:

1: A lifetime of learning.

In a world that's changing faster than Superman in a telephone booth, today's top performers are looking for every opportunity to add to their toolbox of skills and experience. Conferences, courses and seminars provide excellent learning opportunities but can pose a significant cost to an organization. To encourage employee development within your organization, why

not assign someone on your team to take on the task of researching, learning and then presenting a topic of importance to your team. Also, assigning a special project acts as a powerful form of non-monetary recognition, helping employees gain new skills and experiences, demonstrating trust in their abilities, and adding variety to an individual's work.

Nonprofits can also collaborate to offer training and skills development sessions in specific areas. Although employees in the sector are better educated than the average Canadian employee base, the HR Council's report identified areas such as IT and web skills, communication and public relations to be weak within many nonprofit organizations.

2: Two (or more) heads are better than one.

Inviting capable junior staff to contribute to key decision-making processes when appropriate not only provides a new, refreshing perspective, but also gives the employee an opportunity to see what's involved in strategic development.

3: Lessons from the playground.

A simple, sincere "thank you", given in a timely manner in reference to a specific event or accomplishment, still proves to be one of the least expensive and most impactful ways to show appreciation to an individual for a job well done. Taking the time to send a handwritten note or letter of appreciation for an employee's effort above and beyond the call of duty, or acknowledging their efforts in front of peers, can help create not only a sense of pride and ownership in their work but also identification as a valuable member of the team.

4: It's the little things that count.

Whether it be an extended patio lunch on a sunny afternoon, movie tickets, a gift certificate to a favorite bookstore or simply a small pot of flowers to brighten the office on a rainy day, there are many cost-effective but meaningful ways to demonstrate thanks and evoke a feeling of appreciation that work towards fulfilling the unwritten but highly valued psychological contract that exists between an employee and their organization. The key to success is in identifying a small token of appreciation that reflects the individual's interests – showing that you've gone the extra mile to individualize the sentiment.

5: Fuel the passion.

Many nonprofit employees are truly passionate about their organization's mission and linking perks to your mission is a great way to motivate your staff. Arts organizations are in the particularly enviable position of being able to fuel this passion by offering their employees free or discounted tickets as a special thank you. Doing so not only allows the employee to engage in cultural opportunities they might not otherwise be able to afford but also adds value to their work by cultivating first-hand knowledge of your cause, along with the ability to then champion it.

6: Flexibility.

As it becomes more and more important to balance the scales between work and life, flexible work schedules or the ability to work from home from time to time are becoming increasingly popular forms of non-monetary reward. This flexibility allows the employee to meet many of their obligations while demonstrating trust in their ability to manage their time and workload.

Recognition is an extremely powerful tool when used effectively. The impact of thanks, praise or a well-considered reward will go a long way towards fostering an environment of positive employee motivation and retention. While the value of monetary compensation should not be underestimated, employees will intuitively offset this benefit with the perceived costs to themselves – time taken, energy spent, personal risk or opportunities lost (for example with family). Establishing what motivates the individual is key to designing and implementing a successful non-monetary reward program.

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Source:

Report #2 – Findings from Canada-wide surveys of employers and employees: Toward a Labour Force Strategy for Canada's Voluntary & Non-profit Sector

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May 2009