# Recognizing, Rewarding and Motivating Employees with Little or No Money-based Incentives

Covid-19 has impacted our work at Emory in many ways and remains a changing landscape, requiring all of us to adjust as best we can. Although there is no pool for merit increases this year, we desire all in our community to continue to grow and develop and still feel valued for their contributions to the University. Recognition, even without a raise, is still motivating and fulfilling, and always important.

It is important for leaders to understand that non-monetary recognition can be very effective in showing your staff appreciation for their hard work and valuable contributions to the University. Extra money is typically thought of first as a means for motivating employees; however, it's often the intangible, non-monetary rewards which have the most impact on staff morale (Pink, 2009).

In a survey conducted by a project team in the 2016-2017 Excellence Through Leadership (ETL) program, staff at Emory were asked how important it is to be recognized outside of the annual review process. Thirty-three percent of respondents felt it was "Extremely important." It was also identified that Spot Awards and a User-friendly peer-to-peer Recognition Program were the highest rated options for reward and recognition.
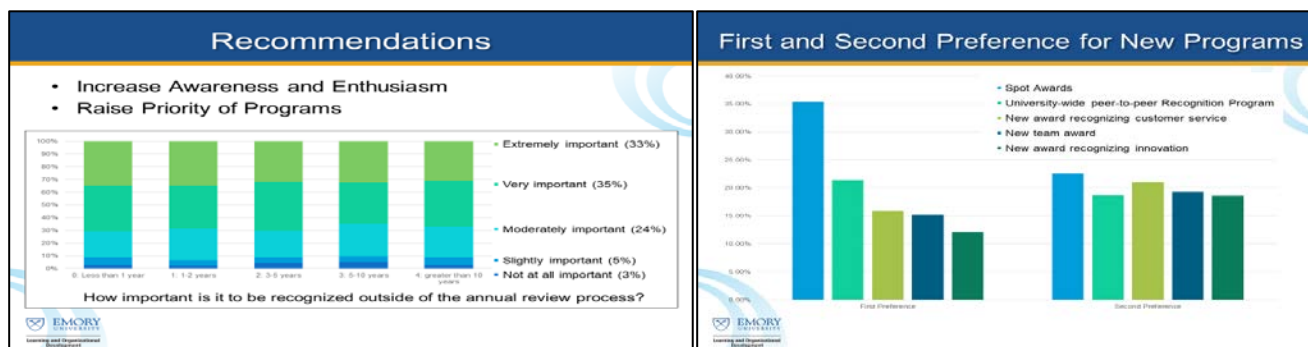
Recognition is a staple of effective leadership and an engaged workforce. The strategies and ideas provided in this document may enhance what some leaders and departments are already doing or serve as a jumpstart for those that have little or nothing currently in place. The focus here is on what non-monetary options exist that managers can use to continue motivating and developing employees both in the absence of a merit pool and when it eventually returns.

Ideas for Non-monetary Recognition and Reward

When it comes to non-monetary approaches to rewarding and recognizing others, there is no magic formula for how this is done, but the basic rule is to get to know your staff and discover what employees' value or what motivates them (Nelson, 1994). From that information, create methods or tactics of recognition and feedback. Recognition and feedback done appropriately and consistently, helps to support and maintain employee engagement and performance management.

Sometimes the simplest approaches are most effective. Gerald Greene and Jeanne Unrah (1990) found that personal congratulations by managers of employees for doing a good job was ranked first from a list of potential incentives – second on the list was giving a personal written note. People want to know that what they do makes a difference. Stopping to recognize individuals is one of the most important steps a manager can take – people want approval and appreciation.

HR has assembled a list of non-monetary and low budget monetary techniques for providing recognition and feedback. Some of these require being back on campus, while others can be done on site or remotely. The techniques have been categorized using the following format:

Categories of Recognition/Reward Techniques

Recognize Individuals: examples might be employee of the month initiative, reward with certificate (or small monetary gift card), give a "pat on the back" or "spot award" for a good job or reward with a day off.
Value the Input & Contributions: show them that you value their input - assign individuals to lead a project, ask for their opinion on bigger decisions, give exposure to upper management, provide them more responsibility.
Autonomy & Flexibility: give staff more independence to do things, trust with decisions and to get the job done, provide for flexible working schedules - flexible hours help to build trust and commitment.
Development Opportunities: assign new responsibilities, provide opportunities to attend classes or training, nominate for a leadership program, allow individuals to spend time with a mentor to guide development.
Celebrate (team): identify ways to make the work a place people are engaged; determine ways to celebrate successes for the team, allow time for team building – the more people connect, the better they work and motivate each other.

Non-Monetary Techniques

	Recognition/Reward Techniques: Non-Monetary	Categories of Recognition/Reward				
		Recognize Individuals	Value the Input & Contributions	Autonomy & Flexibility	Development Opportunities	Celebrate Team
1	Conduct staff meetings to gather team input on decisions.		x		x	x
2	Host quarterly meetings with leader. Prior to the meeting, the leader is provided with key highlights that employees have done for which they are then recognized (by the leader) during the meeting. Share contributions with upper management.	x	x			
3	Assign individuals to project teams to work on special assignments. Assign an individual to lead the team as a special assignment.	x	x		x	
4	Create and distribute a branded recognition award (e.g., "Spirit of Emory"). Can be done on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly, bi-annually).	x				x
5	Develop a peer recognition program that lets employees give each other on-the-spot accolades on a community bulletin board, internal website or department communication. This allows employees to recognize their peers directly.	x				x
6	Recognition e-bulletin board where anyone can put things up to note accomplishments and recognize each other or celebrate a team's accomplishments.	x				x
7	Unofficial birthday holiday (given a half-day off).					x
8	Manager collects accomplishments and then acknowledges at a broader level in a newsletter (article recognition) - could also send to upper management and copy the individual.	x	x			
9	Senior leader gives a trademarked "stamp" on select/high level projects. This is seen as the symbol of high-profile recognition within the department.	x	x	x	x	
10	Provide employees a "good job for…." with a specification on what was done well. Use special paper or thank you cards.	x				
11	Provide the option for a flex work week. Employees would be given a half day off on Friday all through the summer – "Summer Hours." Summer Friday – employees have the option to work "4-10s" in order to have Friday off.	x		x		x
12	Allow employees paid time off to do volunteer work or do as a team -- this can offer not only a nice break from the office, but also provides the added benefit of increased morale.				x	x
13	Establish an exchange program with another School/Division within the University so that employees can work in a different department to learn different skills and/or methods.				x	

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14	Give the employee the opportunity to present in front of senior leadership.	x	x		x	
15	Allow the employee the opportunity to share best practices with the team, leadership or other University departments.	x	x		x	
16	Allow for individuals or staff to choose their own core working hours instead of the typical 8 to 5.	x		x		x
17	As a team reward, incorporate fun, healthy competition into the workplace – such as college football team brackets – and award the winner.	x				x
18	Offer tangible recognition for staff who consistently excel - either by sending an email cc'ing in business leaders with congratulations on a job well done, giving staff a handwritten note, or mentioning their successes during monthly meetings.	x	x			
19	Create a monthly office theme day to boost morale - e.g. food theme day with a traveling team trophy.					x
20	Create a monthly, quarterly or annual awards event which showcases the efforts of staff who continually excel in their field. Include peer-nominated or leader-nominated awards to show off the employees who consistently show leadership and help their fellow colleagues.	x	x			
21	Provide individuals more responsibility and autonomy to train others.			x	x	
22	Offer bi-monthly lunch and learns to spotlight expert knowledge on different topics like coaching skills, networking, financial wellness, etc. Invite experts from other areas of the University.				x	x
23	Opportunity to spend quality (1:1) time with their manager or upper management. For example, "Coffee with the (leader)." Make it a special event.		x			
24	Allow individuals the opportunity to spend time with a mentor to guide professional development.			x	x	
25	Randomly post a thank-you note/letter of praise on an employee's office door/desk/workstation/equipment.	x				
26	Hide several positive notes of personal praise around your employees' work area - can also be done for a team recognition.	x				x
27	Give employees a "branded" treat expressing appreciation, such as Life Savers, Kudos bars, Kind bars, etc.	x				
28	Invite employees to represent their department at a meeting they typically would not attend. Have them report back to their team.		x		x	

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29	Provide a letter of commendation for the employee on great work that they have accomplished.	x	x			
30	With feedback, provide the employee more deserved challenges or responsibilities. Help them to learn new skills that will benefit them going forward. Giving people the chance to lead teams or tasks or even providing educational opportunities, all show that you feel employees are worth investing in.		x	x	x	
31	Celebrate a service anniversary.	x				x
32	Give assignments with a required time frame for completion and let the individual enjoy the freedom to complete them, given some guidelines set on their own merits.		x	x		
33	Ask for the employee's opinion on a problem facing the team/project, etc.		x			
34	Assign an employee to a University committee.	x	x		x	
36	Create a traveling trophy (e.g., golden object, special hat, figurine, etc.) that moves employee-to-employee based on being "caught" doing something outstanding.	x				x
37	Nominate an individual to take part in a LOD leadership program. Discuss the honor and privilege of this.	x			x	
38	Assign the employee to a high-profile project.		x		x	
39	Get each employee to write something positive about the person on a piece of paper, and give them the box of collected sayings, or create a booklet for the employee.	x				
40	Give others the opportunity to nominate staff for good service.	x				x
41	Recognize an accomplishment at weekly staff meetings in front of peers.	x				
42	"Thank you" meeting - call an employee into your office to just say thanks. It's most impactful if you simply say thanks for a that "thing" and nothing else. Don't discuss other issues - don't make it a part of another meeting; only talk about the good work.	x				
43	Give out coupons that allow employees to wear jeans on a day of their choosing or designate an all-employee jeans day.	x				x

References

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