

# Using effective rewards and recognition



Think a paycheck is all that's needed to keep staff members content and working hard? Think again. Rewards and recognition keep your team motivated and coming back for more.

By Katherine Bontrager, Associate Editor

In an increasingly tight job market, recognition and rewards are more important than ever. Need proof? A recent VetMedTeam.com survey asked team members, "How important are demonstrations of employee appreciation to your overall job satisfaction?" A resounding 72 percent of respondents found the power of praise to be "extremely important." And such feelings of fulfillment and appreciation for a job well done can compensate for other job frustrations, such as average pay, long hours, or a lengthy commute.

"Rewards and recognition are vital," says *Veterinary Economics* Editorial Advisory Board member Dr. Jim Kramer, CVPM, a partner at Columbus Animal Hospital in Columbus, Neb. "Working in a practice can be repetitive, messy, tiresome, and difficult, so the work isn't necessarily its own reward. And the success of a veterinary practice depends largely on its staff members."

In fact, experts argue that you can't be successful without a motivated team. "When we fail to reward those who give us outstanding contributions, we reduce

## Be an original

Have you ever heard the expression, "More carrot and less stick"? You'll find more than a thousand creative "carrot" ideas in *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* (Workman Publishing Co., 1994) by Bob Nelson, Ph.D. Nelson is the president of Nelson Motivation Inc. and co-author of *The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook: The Complete Guide* (Workman Publishing Co., 2003). Just a few of his suggestions:

- A handwritten thank-you note
- A small contribution to a favorite charity
- A colorful bulletin board notice
- Flowers, balloons, or a bouquet
- A round of golf
- A gift certificate
- A massage, facial, or manicure
- A half- or full-day off
- Relief from a workplace chore.

For more unique ideas check out

[www.nelson-motivation.com](http://www.nelson-motivation.com).

### The bottom line

Rewards and recognition improve morale, job satisfaction, and productivity—and they don't have to cost your practice a bundle. Nonmonetary rewards, such as thank-you notes and flexible work hours, can be just as effective as cash.



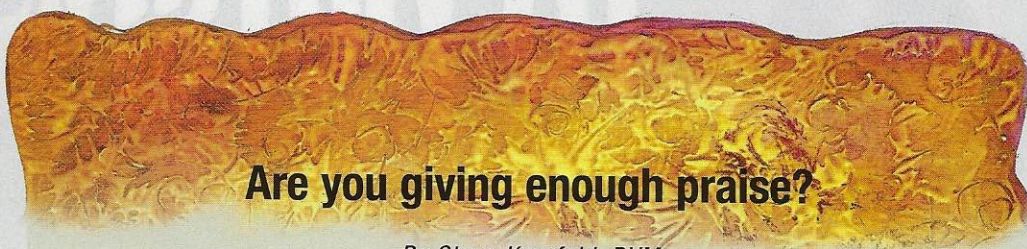
their morale and motivation, and we send a message that mediocrity is OK," says ArLyne Diamond, Ph.D., a management consultant and professional development coach with Diamond Associates in Santa Clara, Calif.

### How do you motivate staff members?

Dr. Kramer motivates his team members by sharing a sense of noble purpose with them and by giving them a stake in the

outcome. "If the practice benefits then staff members should benefit, too," he says. For example, the practice matches Simple IRAs up to 3 percent and offers profit sharing bonuses each quarter depending on the office's finances. "The positive effect of giving team members a stake in the consequences of their decisions has been far greater than our expenditures," Dr. Kramer says.

Tess Marshall, a professional speaker and coach, and author of *Flying by the*



### Are you giving enough praise?

By Steve Kornfeld, DVM

Studies show staff morale, devotion to better care, and turnover improve when team members feel they're recognized for their actions. Think you provide enough recognition and praise? Get a good impression of how appreciated staff members feel by asking them to answer yes and no— anonymously and in writing—to these commonly asked statements:

- I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day here.
- In the last seven days, I received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- The veterinarians and management team care about me as a person.
- I am encouraged to improve my development.
- My opinion matters here.
- My team members recognize my efforts at work.
- In the last six months, someone here talked to me about my progress.
- My needs are properly met.

Use your team members' answers to find out how much work you need to do to motivate your group and recognize their achievements.

Also ask yourself, "How often do I recognize my staff?" Write down the number of kudos you give out in a typical day. Do you think that's enough thanks? Would you be highly motivated if you received that much praise? The bottom line: You may want to reconsider how—and how often—you applaud your team members.

One idea that might work for you: Ask one or more team members to hand out recognition cards for jobs well done. When a hard-working team member accumulates four cards, give him or her a written thank-you note and a small reward, such as a half hour off work or movie tickets. And when a team member collects enough mementos recognizing his or her work, consider a more official reward such as a promotion, plaque, or raise.

*Dr. Steve Kornfeld is the founder of Veterinary Coaching Enterprises and leads in-house seminars in motivation and leadership.*

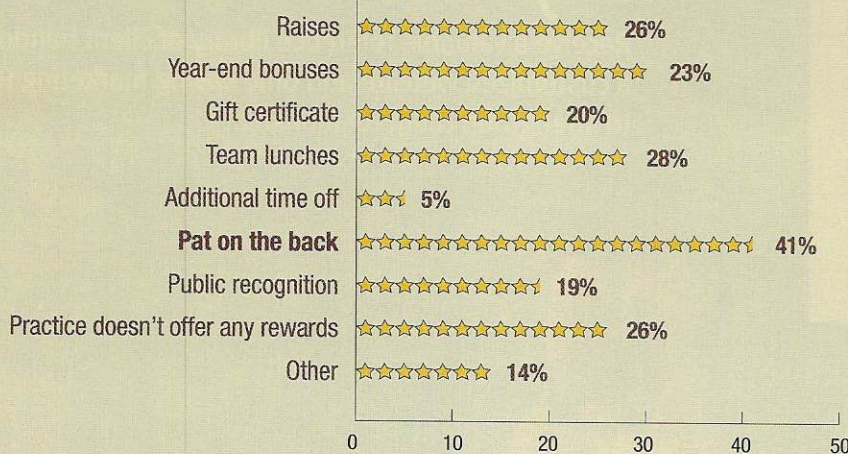
I've learned that  
people will forget  
what you said.  
People will forget  
what you did.  
But people will  
never forget  
how you made  
them feel.

—Maya Angelou



## Do you offer staff members any of the following rewards for achieving a specific goal?

Almost half of respondents to The 2005 *Veterinary Economics* Practice Trends Study, conducted by Advanstar Veterinary Healthcare Communications, say they reward staff members with a simple “pat on the back” when they achieve a specific goal. Here’s more:



**Brains, like hearts,  
go where they are  
appreciated.**

—Robert McNamara,  
former U.S. Secretary  
of Defense

*Seat of My Soul* (Happy Life, 2003), agrees that rewards help people feel vested in the process of change or improvement. “When people feel emotionally involved, the spirit of the company improves. Rewards make people feel special—and that’s a universal need.”

Of course, she says, you need to pair incentives with the training and support your team members need to achieve the goal. “When you offer incentives in an atmosphere that generates ongoing communication and support, people make stronger commitments to achieving their goals,” says Marshall.

Trying to decide what type of incentive to offer? Diamond believes some rewards work better than others. The key is to know your audience. “Some people prefer public recognition, others monetary rewards, others more opportunities to be creative. There is no one-size-fits-all reward.”

There is one constant, though: Be timely. You should offer the reward as soon as possible after reaching the goal. ►

## Fun team morale boosters

Need ideas to boost your whole team’s morale? Here are a few suggestions from author Bob Nelson, Ph.D.:

- Order pizza or sandwiches for a relaxed, fun communal lunch.
- Plan an Ugly Tie, Crazy Shirt, or Silly Socks day and award small prizes for the most outlandish outfits.
- Hold betting pools for the Super Bowl, Kentucky Derby, Academy Awards, or other high-profile events.
- Bring a digital camera to work and capture candid and funny shots of staff members to share later.



One of the stepping stones to a world-class operation is to tap into the creative and intellectual power of each and every employee.

—Harold Poling, former chairman and CEO of Ford Motor Co.

## Rewarding case studies

In his book, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* (Workman Publishing Co., 1994), Bob Nelson, Ph.D., highlights fun, unique—and easily copied—strategies successful companies have used to bring out the best in their employees. Three such examples include:

- A physical therapist's office instituted a Margarita

Award for the therapist who worked with the toughest client that week or month. The group treated the winner to a margarita happy hour.

- A trucking company awards bonuses every six months to employees who weren't absent or late more than three times and who weren't involved in a preventable accident.

- A dentist took his staff on a field trip to a shopping mall and gave each employee an envelope with \$200. There were only two stipulations: Each person had to buy at least five things, and any money left after two hours had to be returned. At the next staff meeting, employees got to show off their purchases.

### A just reward

As integral as an incentive can be, you need to make sure you're offering something that's fair to all your team members. "Employees value incentive programs, but they often complain about the implementation," says Marshall.

The key: Make sure you're rewarding

results that team members can actually control, that everyone has the same opportunity to succeed, and that you can track everyone's efforts accurately so you dole out the rewards fairly. Finally, don't get thrown off by thinking you have to spend a lot of money to show you value team members' contributions.

"Monetary rewards actually have some serious limitations," says Marshall. "The money is often forgotten soon after it's spent. So you may enjoy more long-term goodwill by offering such rewards as career-advancement opportunities, flexible work hours, and opportunities to gain new skills." In fact, she says, these types of nonmonetary rewards can be as important as monetary rewards in motivating employees, limiting turnover, improving morale and job satisfaction, and increasing productivity and profitability.

Another powerful tool in your arsenal: a personal thank-you note that recognizes a team member's specific contribution or achievement and value. This small gesture may offer one of your best opportunities to express appreciation for your team members' talents. And the five minutes you spend putting the right words on paper could yield immeasurable improvement in morale and motivation. ♦

### Does the possibility of a reward motivate your staff members?

Almost three-fourths of respondents to The 2005 *Veterinary Economics Practice Trends Study* said the possibility of rewards motivated their staff members.

