

The ABCs of Management Gift-Giving

The holidays are here and you'd like to show your appreciation to your staff. But you can't spend a lot of money. What can you do?

Choosing a gift can be a headache—and an opportunity. We believe there's a wide array of gift ideas that any manager in any department of any organization can use to send a special, and important, message.



*You can show your appreciation (and build loyalty)
with very little money or shopping.*

By Beverly L. Kaye and
Sharon Jordan-Evans

First, ask what you want your gift to do. Encourage? Open up some opportunities? Just say thanks? Your gift can double as a personalized retention strategy aimed at those employees you truly want to keep on your team.

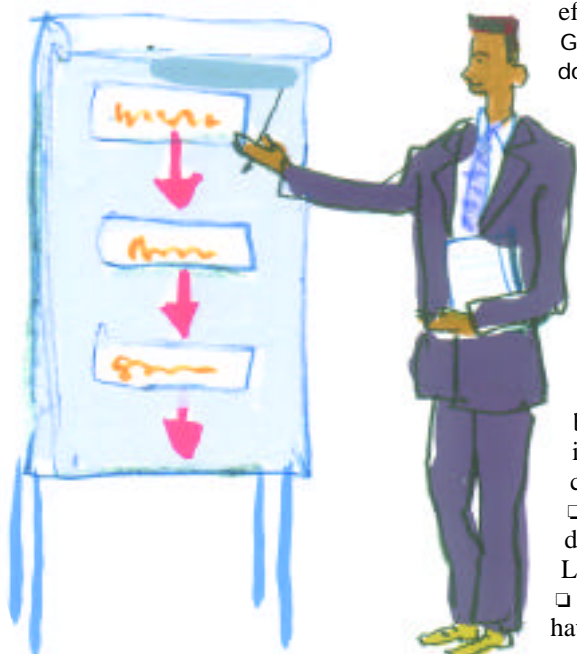
Here are two gift-giving rules to keep in mind:

Rule 1. If your employees expect it, it might not be viewed as a gift. You may think that the annual bonus (often given at this time of year) is ample reward and recognition for work well done. Your employees may see it differently. In many organizations, bonuses—and even such perks as cell phones and health-club memberships—are no longer seen as special by employees, particularly those who have come to expect them. If that's the case, you'll have to get creative to find rewards that work.

Rule 2. Gifts need to match employees' needs and wants. Yes, different strokes for different folks. Don't guess at what your employees want. Ask them. Usually their requests aren't too difficult to grant and almost always are less than what you might have imagined. Think about yourself. What could *your* boss do that would really show how much he or she values you? It may be a small thing after all.

The gift catalogue

To spark your creative thinking, we've created a list of gifts based on our re-



search on the reasons talented people stay in organizations. You can use these ideas or let them be catalysts for your own. But do remember to customize them to fit your employees. You can also use the list to create a gift menu or catalogue from which people can select the gifts they want.

Gift A: Private time with you. "A" for ask. An employee can select a lunch date and even the restaurant. It can be a time for you to get to know your staff better and tell them how important they are to you and the team. You might ask questions such as

- What can I do to keep you on my team?
- What part of your work do you find most enjoyable?
- What might make your work life easier?
- What can I do to be more supportive

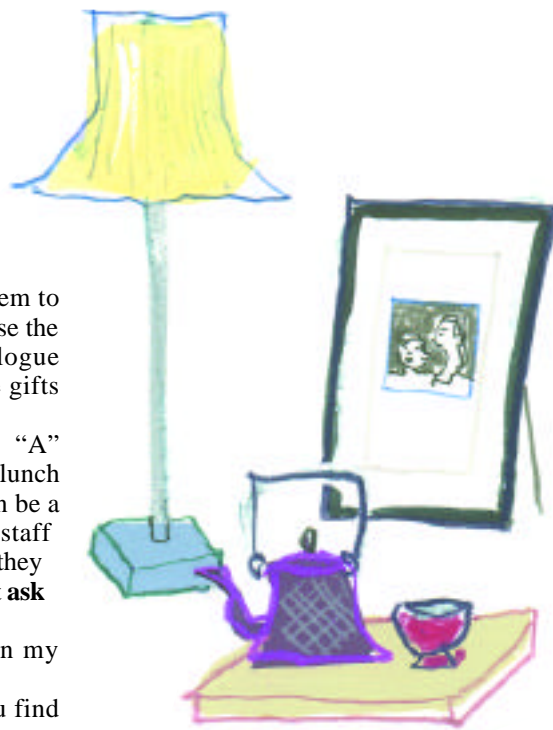
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or help you be even more effective?

Gift B: Long-awaited request, done! Think hard about an employee who has asked you for something that you've put on your to-do list and there it sat. Stop passing the buck. Surprise that employee and just do it!

Gift C: Frank talk about the future. Offer to have a career conversation with an employee. Hold it in a quiet, private place—off-site if possible. Try any or all of the following questions to get the conversation started:

- What part of your current job do you enjoy doing the most? Least?
- Which one of your talents haven't I used yet?



- What different jobs do you see yourself doing in the future?

Gift D: Representing the company. "D" for **dignity**. Give employees the chance to attend an outside conference or seminar designed especially for their affinity group.

Gift E: Professional growth. Let employees choose from a list of potential projects, assignments, or tasks that could **enrich** their work.

Gift F: Recognizing family. Give employees a prepaid phone card (international for those with distant loved ones), or offer to have someone design a family Website and include a one-year subscription for email. Or give a free pass for X number of days or hours off to attend children's school programs or sports activities.

Or ask employees how they would like to honor **family**. An employee might want to bring a family member or pet to work one day, have a group work event that includes family, or invite you or have you invite his or her family to dinner.

Gift G: The next move. Offer to brainstorm alternative career possibilities, off-site if possible. Try to help the employee leverage options to reach his or her **goals**. Use the LEVERR framework: lateral, enrichment, vertical, exploratory, realignment (moving down to move into something else), or relocation (yes, ouch, but do talk about it).

Gift H: Interview participation. Let an employee participate in the **hiring**

process for a new manager one level or more above.

Gift I: Professional interests. Give a free one-year subscription to an employee's favorite business magazine and have it sent to his or her home. Satisfy employees' need for **information**.

Gift J: Submit to pruning. This can be a tough gift to give. Nevertheless, ask the employee whom you never agree with, is least like you, to engage in some straight talk about how you might work together better.

Yes, offer this to the employee who probably thinks you're a **jerk**. Listen carefully, and don't defend yourself. Then take a step towards changing at least one behavior.

Gift K: A unique perk for fun. Give an employee a "**Kicks Coupon**" that entitles him or her to spend up to X amount of money on a way to take a break or have some fun at work. It could involve the entire team. Or offer a menu of low-cost possibilities and let employees choose.

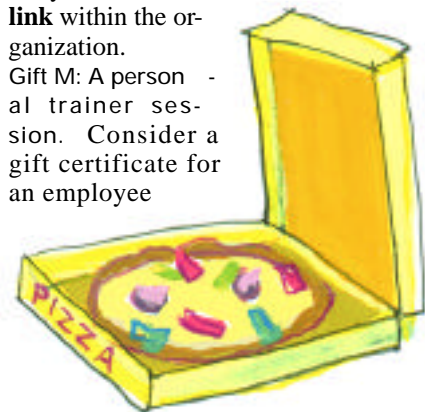
For example,

- ❑ an afternoon off to see a movie
- ❑ ordered-in pizza and a rented video during lunch
- ❑ a golf coach to give a lesson.

Or is one of your staff a sports nut? An opera fan? A theater buff? Give tickets to see a favorite team, diva, or playwright. That's bound to rate higher than the holiday turkey and shows you care about employees as individuals.

Gift L: A priceless introduction. Ask the employee for the name of someone in the organization that he or she would like to meet, chat with, and learn more about. Provide an introduction, and encourage the employee to decide on how he or she would like to spend the time. You not only show your appreciation, but you also create a **link** within the organization.

Gift M: A personal trainer session. Consider a gift certificate for an employee



to have lunch with you or another **mentor** of his or her choice for the purpose of being coached.

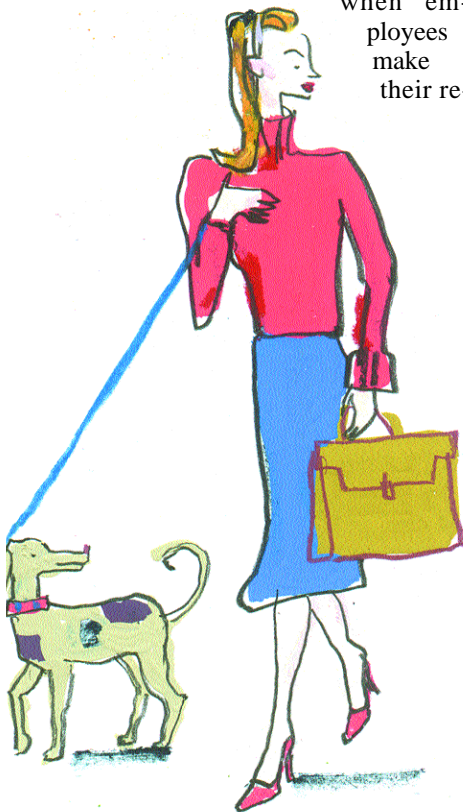
Gift N: Three wishes. Think about a key employee that you don't want to lose. Run the **numbers** on the cost of replacing that employee. Now compute the cost of offering that employee some "stay here" incentives, other than money, and base the incentives on what you know about that person. Pick three incentives you'd be willing to offer and set a date to chat.

Gift O: A new door. Brainstorm an **opportunity** hit list with an employee about growing, learning, and stretching in some new way. Another opportunity could be seeing and learning about another part of the business. Prioritize the list and then open a door!

Gift P: Blending work and passion. Have a "**Passion Breakfast**" for all employees, a team, or one-on-one. Ask, What do you love to do? At work? Outside of work? Brainstorm and commit to helping them build more of what they love into their workday.

Gift Q: An exception to the rules. Give a "**Bend the Rules**" pass that involves and encourages going against the status quo. Bend as much as you can

when employees make their re-



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quests. Show you're willing to **question** rules.

Gift R: Genie in a bottle. Ask an employee to write down six ways he or she would like to be **rewarded**. Anything goes. The only rule is that half of the ideas have to be low cost or no cost.

Gift S: Feeling at home at work. Offer a shopping spree to a local office supply store for items to personalize one's **space**; no staplers or paper clips.

Gift T: Listening to the truth. Talk about gift giving. This one—the **truth**—is powerful. We know of one division head who gave each employee \$50, said to choose a restaurant and take their managers out to lunch for some straight talk and honest feedback about performance and development needs.

Gift U: A chance to download. Give 12 coupons for listening time—one for each month, in which an employee can talk about anything for 20 minutes. Your job isn't to **understand**, just listen.

Gift V: Honoring values. Over a cappuccino, glass of wine, or cup of tea, try asking one of your employees any of these questions:

- What do you think makes a perfect day at work?
- Looking back, what has satisfied you the most?
- What does the word success mean to you?

Take notes, and read them back to the employee. What did you both learn about his or her **values**? How can you put that information to use?

Gift W: A day of health. Have a limousine pick up an employee for a full

day at a spa. Give gift coupons for Tai Chi, yoga, or golf lessons. You get the idea. Encourage **wellness**.

Gift X: Playtime. Give a fun-loving Gen Xer or anyone a series of "Get out and Play" cards they can redeem at their discretion—to leave work early to go to a movie, shop, or play Frisbee.

Gift Y: The starring role, for once.

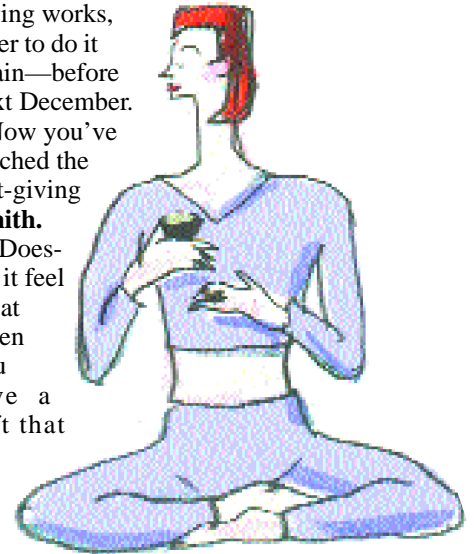
Give an employee the chance to lead a project you've been hoarding for yourself. (You know which one!) Offer the spotlight, **yield**, coach when necessary. What did you and the employee learn?

Gift Z: A promise to repeat the gift.

If this kind of gift giving works, offer to do it again—before next December.

Now you've reached the gift-giving **zenith**.

Doesn't it feel great when you give a gift that



is right on target? You get a double reward: the return on your investment of time, energy, and (little) money is the promise of building a more productive and fulfilling workplace. And you do it while increasing your own team's commitment and loyalty (yes, employee loyalty does still exist).

Happy Holidays. □

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The gift-giving ideas are derived from the authors' research and strategies in their book, *Love 'Em Or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay* (Berrett-Koehler, 1999).