



# Gifts That Keep On Giving

## *And Require Very Little Money or Shopping*

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based on WSJ's best selling *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*  
written by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans

*Good, imaginative, inexpensive gifts? You can give them. Impossible? Read on.*

Yes, the holidays are looming. What can you give to your employees? Choosing a gift can be a headache and an opportunity. On the opportunity side, we believe there is a wide array of gift ideas that any manager in any department of any organization could use to send a very special (and very important) message to an employee.

**Giving Can Be Keeping** What do you want your gift to do? To encourage? To open some opportunities? Just to say thanks? Your gift can also 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 ONE** *If your employees expect it, it may 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. Many bonuses – and even perks such as cell phones and health club memberships – are no longer seen as special, especially for those who have come to expect them. If that's the case, you'll have to get creative to find rewards that work!

**RULE TWO** *Gifts need to match your employee's needs and wants.*

Yes, different strokes for different folks. Don't guess at what your employees want. Ask them. Usually their requests are not too difficult to grant and almost always they are less than you might imagine. Think about you, for example. What could your boss do that would really demonstrate how much he or she values you? It may be a small thing after all.

**Your Gift Catalogue** In case this kind of thinking doesn't come easily, we've created a list of potential gifts that can spark your creative thinking. The list is based on our research of the reasons talented people stay in organizations (A-Z). Use these ideas, or let them be catalysts for your own thinking. Build on them and remember to customize them to fit each of your employees' individual wants. Or use the list to create a gift menu from which people can select exactly the gift they want.

### **A** *Private time with you.*

Schedule lunch dates with employees. Give them an opportunity to select the luncheon site, and use the time to simply get to know them better.

Tell them how critical they are to you and the team, then **ASK** them some questions, like:

- 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 could I do to be more supportive or to help you be even more effective?

### **B** *A long-awaited action item – done!*

employee who has asked you for something that you've put on your very lengthy "to do" list – and there it sits. Stop passing the **BUCK**. Surprise that employee – and just do it.

### **C** *An honest talk about the future.*

Offer to have a **CAREER** conversation with an employee.

Hold it in a quiet, private place or 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 of your talents have I not yet used? What different jobs might you like to see yourself doing in the future?

### **D** *The honor of representing the company at a conference.*

Offer **DIGNITY** – the chance to attend an outside conference/ seminar series designed especially for their affinity group.

### **E** *A chance to grow professionally.*

Allow the employee to choose from a list of potential projects, assignments and tasks that could **ENRICH** his or her work.

### **F** *Recognizing your employee's family.*

Give an employee a pre-paid phone card to call **FAMILY** or friends (get an international card for employees with loved ones far away), or offer to have someone design a web site for their family, and include a one-year subscription for e-mail. Or give a free pass for either X-days or X-hours off to attend children's school programs or sports activities. Or ask your employee how they would like to honor "family." Are you open to these ideas? Your employee might decide to:

- bring a family member to work one day
- have a group event one evening with family members
- bring a pet to work
- have a "show and tell" about a hobby or something they do outside of work
- maybe even have you invite their family to dinner

### **G** *Talking about your employee's next move.*

Offer to brainstorm alternative career possibilities. (Again, do this off-site if possible.) Try to help that employee leverage their options to reach his/her **GOALS**. Use the **LEVERR** framework. Consider Lateral, Enrichment, Vertical, Exploratory, Realignment (moving down to move into something else) and Relocation. (Yes, ouch... but do talk about it.)

### **H** *Serving on an interview committee for a key position.*

Allow an employee to participate in the **HIRING** process for a new manager – one level above them, or more.

### **I** *Nourishing your employee's professional interests.*

Offer a free one-year subscription to an employee's favorite business magazine and have it sent to their home. Satisfy their need for **INFORMATION**.

**J** Submit to a critical employee's "pruning."

OK. This may be one of the tougher gifts to give. But here it is. Ask the employee that you never see eye to eye with, the one who is the least like you, to give you some straight talk about how you might work better together. Yes, offer this to the one who may think you're a **JERK**. Listen very carefully. DON'T defend. Then, take a step towards changing one behavior.

**K** A unique "perk" for fun.

Give an employee a **KICKS** Coupon. Tell them that this entitles them to spend up to X 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 them choose. Need some examples?

- taking an afternoon off to see a movie
- bringing a child (or dog) to work one day
- ordering in pizza and watching a video during lunch
- bringing your golf coach in to give a lesson to your colleagues

Or is one of your direct reports a sports nut? An opera fan? A theater buff? Probably tickets to see their favorite team, diva or playwright rank higher on the appreciation scale than that standard turkey bonus. And it shows that you care about the employee as an individual.

**L** A priceless introduction.

Ask an employee for the name of someone in the organization that he/she would love to meet, chat with, and learn more about. Create the **LINK**. Provide an introduction and encourage your employee to decide on how he/she would like to spend time with the chosen *connection*.

**M** A workplace personal trainer session.

Consider a gift certificate entitling an employee to lunch with you or another **MENTOR** of his/her choosing for the purpose of being coached on one or more topics.

**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. (List every cost--soft and hard--that you can think of.) Now compute the cost of offering that employee some *stay here* incentives. (Think of incentives other than money, and base your list on what you know about that person.) Pick three that you would be willing to offer. Now set a date to chat.

**O** Open a new door.

Brainstorm an **OPPORTUNITY** hit list with an employee -- some might be about growing, learning, stretching, in some new way. Others could be related to a chance to see another part of the business. Prioritize the list and then open a door!

**P** Blend your employee's work and passion.

Have a **PASSION** Breakfast. (Maybe this is something you offer to all your employees, as a team, or one on one.) Simply ask... What do you love to do? At work? Outside of work? Brainstorm a bit and then commit to helping them build more of this into the workday.

**Q** An exception to the rules.

Give a *Bend the Rules* pass that involves and encourages bending (or breaking) the status quo. Then stay open and *bend* as much as you can when they make their request. Show that you'll **QUESTION** the rules.

**R** Play genie in a bottle to your employee's recognition wish list.

Ask an employee to write down six ways they would like to be **REWARDED**. Anything goes. The only rule is that half the ideas need to be low cost or no cost.

**S** Help them feel at home at work.

Offer a shopping spree to a local supply store for an employee to get items (no staplers or paper clips allowed) to personalize his/her **SPACE**: office, vehicle, work station or cubicle.

**T** Listen to the truth -- over lunch!

Talk about gift giving. This one -- the **TRUTH** -- is powerful. We know of one division head who gave each employee \$50, told them to choose a restaurant and take their manager out to lunch for some straight talk and honest feedback about performance and development needs.

**U** A chance to download.

Give 12 coupons for *listening time* -- one for each month where an employee can come for 20 minutes and talk to you about anything. Your job is to **UNDERSTAND**, i.e., just listen to them.

**V** Honor your employee's values.

Over a cappuccino, glass of wine, or a cup of tea, try asking one of your employees any of these questions:

- What makes a perfect day at work?
- Looking back, what's made you the most satisfied?
- What does success mean to you?

Take notes. Read your notes back to that employee. What have you both learned about his/her **VALUES**? How can you put that information to use?

**W** A day of improving 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**.

**X** Play time.

Give a fun-loving **X-ER** (or anyone) a series of *Get out and Play* cards that they can redeem at their discretion. For example: Leave work early to go to a movie, or shopping, or play extreme Frisbee.

**Y** The starring role, for once.

Give an employee a chance to lead that project that you've been hoarding for yourself. (You'll know which it is!) Offer the spotlight. **YIELD**. Coach when necessary. What has he/she learned? What did you learn?

**Z** Your promise to repeat the gift.

If this kind of *gift giving* worked, offer to do it again -- before next December! Now you've reached the gift-giving **ZENITH**.

**And Back to You**

Doesn't it feel great when you give a gift that is *right on*? You get a double reward from this kind of gift-giving. The return on your investment (of time, energy and money) is the promise of building a more productive and fulfilling workplace. And you can do it while increasing your own home team's loyalty (yes, it does still exist) and commitment.

**Happy Holidays**

