

Building a safety incentive program that really works – advice from some top industry leaders

According to safety leader Buck Peavey, president of Peavey Performance Systems, “Merchandise awards alone will not make a successful program or create a safety-conscious environment. Programs tend to be much more effective when you build an environment of safety awareness through weekly reinforcement, team building, group interaction, positive peer pressure and constant communication.”

Also consider how to distribute incentives. Companies favor lottery-style programs that make everyone a winner with gifts that reinforce corporate identity to spark high interest.

In developing an incentive program for your company, you don't need to start from scratch. A little research will uncover rich, extensive resource of information on incentives based on the experience of companies with successful programs. Despite the diversity, a few common themes dominate.

Decide what behaviors to reward and reward them consistently. According to Michael LeBoeuf, management consultant, begin with one question: What behaviors do we want to reward? The thesis of his book, *The Greatest Management Principle in the World*, is “the things that get rewarded get done.” It’s a simple axiom, yet day-to-day practices and unwritten codes-of-behavior can reward undesirable behaviors. In one example, an official goal might be company loyalty yet the highest salaries may go to the newest employee or to those who threaten to quit.

Offer meaningful incentives. Meaningful incentives are tied to specific behaviors or results. They’re also timely and appropriate to the level of accomplishment. “An employee who completes a two-year project should be rewarded in a more substantial way than the one who simply does a favor for you,” writes Bob Nelson in *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*. To boost the impact of an incentive, give it soon after the goal has been met.

Customize incentives to your company. What works for one company might not work for others. Company cultures differ radically; and successful incentives will, too. Before you choose an incentive, consider the demographics of your employees – age, rate of turnover, geographic location diversity. Nelson suggests that you distribute a “reinforcer survey” to find out what kinds of rewards employees actually want. Incentive programs thrive on employee input. Keep it simple. Joan Klubnick, author of *Rewarding and Recognizing Employees*, notes that managers and supervisors often fail to give recognition for a simple reason: they don't know what to say. Klubnick offers a recipe for recognition – basic guidelines to use every day.

1. Thank the employee by name.
2. State specifically what the employee did to earn your recognition.
3. Explain how you felt about this behavior.
4. State how the behavior added value to the company.
5. Thank the person again by name.