Informal recognition can be used every day to acknowledge contributions of individuals, teams, and work groups. As with all recognition, it should be tied to a specific behavior or activity that you want to reinforce.

What does your unit/department value? The types of contributions that might be recognized are:

- staying late to help someone prepare a presentation for the next day
- volunteering to cover for a co-worker who is out sick
- going out of your way to help boost morale or create a positive, inclusive work environment exceeding expectations for a goal or milestone in a long-term collaborative project

Employee Recognition Ideas (no cost)

- Post a thank you note on an employee’s door.
- Take time to explain to new employees the norms and culture of your department.
- Give special assignments to people who show initiative.
- Arrange for a team to present the results of its efforts to upper management.
- Encourage and recognize staff who pursue continuing education.
- Create and post an “Employee Honor Roll” in reception area.
- Acknowledge individual achievements by using employee’s name when preparing a status report
- Make a thank-you card by hand.
- Give employees an extra long lunch break.
- Establish a place to display memos, posters, photos and so on, recognizing progress towards goals and thanking individual employees for their help.
- Swap a task with an employee for a day – his/her choice.
- Establish a “Behind the Scenes” award specifically for those whose actions are not usually in the limelight.
- Nominate the employee for a University formal award program.
- Keep in mind that managers should serve as coaches to indirectly influence rather than demand desired behavior.
- Present “State of the Department” reports periodically to your employees acknowledging the work and contributions of individuals and teams.
- At a monthly staff meeting, award an Employee of the Month and invite co-workers at the meeting to say why that person is deserving of the award.
- Recognize employees who actively serve the community.
- Have staff vote for top manager, supervisor, employee and rookie of the year.
- Name a continuing recognition award after an outstanding employee.
- Include an employee in a “special” meeting.
- Allow employees to attend meetings in your place when you are not available.
- Create an Above and Beyond the Call of Duty (ABCD) Award.
- Ask your boss to attend a meeting with your employees during which you thank individuals and groups for their specific contributions.
- Pop in at the first meeting of a special project team and express your appreciation for their involvement.
- Send a letter to all team members at the conclusion of a project, thanking them for their participation.
- Start an employee recognition program. Give points for attendance, punctuality, teamwork, etc. Provide gift certificates to employees who reach certain point goals.
- Find ways to reward department-specific performance.
- Plan a surprise achievement celebration for an employee or group of employees.

Continued on next page
Guidelines and Informal Recognition Ideas

Employee Recognition Ideas (no cost) continued

- Start a suggestion program.
- Privately recognize employee’s personal needs and challenges.
- Write a letter of praise recognizing specific contributions and accomplishments. Send a copy to senior management and the employee’s personnel file.
- When you hear a positive remark about someone, repeat it to that person as soon as possible (Face-to-face is best, e-mail or voice mail are good in a pinch).
- Call an employee to your office to thank them (don’t discuss any other issue).
- If you have a department newsletter, publish a “kudos” column and ask for nominations throughout the department.
- Publicly recognize the positive impact on operations of the solutions employees devise for problems.
- Acknowledge individual achievements by using employee names in status reports.
- Express an interest in employee’s career development goals.
- Post a large “ celebration calendar” in your work area. Tack on notes of recognition to specific dates.
- Create and string a banner across the work area.
- Greet employees by name.
- Practice positive nonverbal behaviors that demonstrate appreciation, such as smiles, or a handshake.
- Support “flex-friendly” schedules.
- Encourage employees to identify specific areas of interest in job-related skills. Then arrange for them to spend a day with an in-house “expert” to learn more about the topic.
- Encourage employees to participate in community volunteer efforts.
- Share verbal accolades – forward positive voice mail messages.
- Actively listen to co-workers, especially when discussing their accomplishments and contributions.
- Use 3x5 cards to write “You’re special because...” statements. People can collect the cards and refer to them when things aren’t going perfectly.
- Have a recognition event created by a peer group that decides what they will give and why they will give it.
- Keep a supply of appropriately funny notes that can be given as immediate rewards. Keep the supply visible – in a basket or box in your office.
- Widely publicize suggestions used and their positive impact on your department.
- When someone has spent long hours at work, send a letter of thanks to his/her home.
- Acknowledge and celebrate birthdays.
- Arrange for an outstanding employee to have lunch with a dean or director.
- Allow an employee to choose his/her next assignment.
- Recognize a team accomplishment by designating that team as consultants to other teams.
- Recognize those committed to personal health and wellness.
- Smile. It’s contagious.

Employee Recognition Ideas (minor to moderate cost)

- Plan a surprise picnic.
- Create a Hall of Fame wall with photos of outstanding employees.
- Make a photo collage about a successful project that shows the people that worked on it, its stage of development and its completion and presentation.
- Find out the person’s hobby and buy an appropriate gift.
- Make and deliver a fruit basket.
- Inscribe a favorite book as a gift

Continued on next page
Employee Recognition Ideas (minor to moderate cost) continued

- Give the person a membership or subscription to a journal that relates to their work
- Design a “Stress Support Kit” that included aspirin, a comedy cassette, wind up toys and a stress ball – or design your own.
- Serve ice cream sundaes to all of your employees at the end of a project.
- Once a year, have a “Staff Appreciation Day” where the managers supply, cook and serve food.
- Serve a team a hero party sandwich at the end of an assignment, for a job well done.
- Give flowers to an employee at their home or office as a thank you.
- Purchase a unique pin to serve as a memento for a task well done.
- Hold informal retreats to foster communication and set goals.
- Provide a lunch for project teams once they have made interim findings. Express your appreciation.
- Give a personalized coffee cup.
- Give an employee a blue ribbon for achievement.
- Design and give magnets with appropriate messages.
- Give a deserving employee a mug filled with treats.
- Give a framed poem (poster or card) as a thank you.
- Throw a pizza lunch party for your unit.
- Give a note reading, “Thank you. You are a ______!” Attach a roll of Lifesavers.
- Serve popcorn and lemonade on Friday (especially after a particularly hard week).
- Give a puzzle as an award to a problem solver.
- Have weekly breakfasts with groups of employees.
- Treat an employee to lunch.
- Give out gold coins for a job well done.
- Bake/bring a gift (cookies, bread, etc.) for an outstanding employee or team.
- Send birthday cards to employees’ homes, signed by dean or director.

(Adapted from the University of Washington and the University of Michigan)