

# How to Reward Your Employee (Aside from a Pay Raise)



There are many ways to boost staff enthusiasm, motivation, and job satisfaction.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

**To Our Readers:** *There are no foolish questions. Chances are that if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to lynn@soshms.com which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.*

## Topic: Wage Fatigue

Dear Lynn,

*My office manager has been with me for 16 years and I appreciate all she does and continues to do. Every year she earns a raise in pay. This year, I gave her less than a 2% increase because her salary is becoming top-heavy for the business. I pay part of her health insurance and she has an IRA through the business. Any suggestions on how I can make her feel more valued financially without it straining the bottom line?*

Congratulations for creating the type of environment that encourages a staff member to stay with you for 16 years! Many practices only dream of reaching such a milestone. It seems the necessary “give and take” atmosphere has been mutually satisfying thus far.

Your question is a good one. Here are several thoughts to consider relative to wage management.

**One**—Enthusiasm associated with wage increases often fades quickly—a few short months—and along with it, employee motivation. More frequent incentives, associated with preferred behavior, such as paid time off or special bonus rewards (gift cards, event tickets), can be an alter-

to suggest a top number now after she has already invested 16 years of her working life into your practice.

Either way, receiving less than her expected increase at this point could lead to job dissatisfaction, reduced productivity, and possible re-

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nate means of effectively stimulating employee performance.

**Two**—Hopefully, previous annual wage increases were based on written performance reviews rather than just a calendar rolling over. If they were not, you have set a pay raise expectation that after 16 years is going to be difficult to adjust without a snub from your disappointed employee.

**Three**—What was the discussion at the time of her hire (think back!) regarding any kind of salary cap? There was such a discussion, right? If not, then again, it would be difficult

sentiment. Likewise, if this does negatively affect her productivity, it could eventually lead to your resentment. Neither scenario is pretty.

Now, as for ideas, maybe one of these would help:

1) Communicate. Talk with her to find out what she is thinking. Find out what motivates her in life and at work. Too many times, employers give incentives they believe their employees would like, instead of asking them for a preferred “wish list”. If she is a working mom, balancing work and home can often be trying, so perhaps having a half-day (or a full day) off each month would be

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greatly appreciated to help keep her happily adjusted. This doesn't have to involve a great expense for the

employees do. Remember to say "thank you" for their efforts, catch them doing good things and praise them. Reward them with a special thank you—a lunch, for example—when

when applying for a job in our practice. Someone just pointed out to me recently that it is discriminatory or possibly illegal. Is it?

**Disclaimer:** The following advice is general in nature and not a substitute for individualized advice from a qualified legal practitioner.

**Paramount in calculating a raise is the employee's performance; not the calendar! You can, however, go a long way to offset payroll by offering suitable and individualized 'perks' to deserving staff.**

There are sentiments on both sides. On one hand, the yeas (interviewers) may argue that photos are an innocuous tool intended to help them remember and identify who applicants are when it is time

practice. If she is health-conscious, perhaps a pre-paid gym membership or spa treatment is worthwhile to her. Or a wind-down weekend for two at a local resort. How about treating her and her spouse/guest to a dinner out—to a place of her choice? Or tickets to a sporting event or concert?

Of course, these are just random ideas. Her ideas are the only ones that would be meaningful to her. If you haven't spoken to her directly about this and don't feel like you know her well enough to make an offer that would satisfy, suggest she first fill out a form\* (enclosed) to learn more about her. One office gave his staff a cash bonus in an envelope for reaching a team goal marker. Then closed the office for two (2) hours and sent them on their own "shopping spree". The only hitch was whatever money they didn't spend in that time frame, they had to give back. It was motivating, challenging, and exciting!

2) Work with her to create a worthwhile bonus program that proves mutually beneficial; for example, receiving a percentage of increased revenue that results from her increased input. This might be relative to collections, reducing those insurance delays/appeals, product or shoe sales, marketing numbers, etc., but as previously stated, it must be directly tied to her work and productivity.

3) This last one is not an "if/then" suggestion—rather an everyday practice. That is to publicly recognize the good work that she, and all your em-

they go over and above, or if they just need a motivating pat on the back. You'd be surprised how motivating this is and a bonus! It leads to repeat good behavior.

These ideas do not suggest a zero wage increase policy, especially in the current labor market and with inflation concerns. You must consider the value of each staff person, the 16 year employee, and their contribution to the practice. Paramount in calculating a raise is the employee's performance, not the calendar! You can, however, go a long way to offset payroll by offering suitable and individualized 'perks' to deserving staff. By the way, did you know that 'perk' is short for perquisite? I leave you with Merriam-Webster: Definition of perquisite. 1: a privilege, gain, or profit incidental to regular salary or wages; especially: one expected or promised.

\*Readers requesting a complimentary copy of this form—email [lynn@soshms.com](mailto:lynn@soshms.com) and write "As we Learn We Grow" in the subject line.

### Topic: Picture This

Dear Lynn,

We always ask that a photo is attached to new applicant resumes



to make their selection. This seems reasonable, but wait.

Others submit that asking for a photo when applying for a job crosses a line of discrimination. Asserting that in doing so, employers/interviewers can then make their selection based on sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), religion, disability, race, or color.

The nays will argue that there should be a distinction between a job search and a dating app! They specifically point to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, and the American Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title I and V). Sadly, requiring a personal photo often leads to qualified applicants reluctant to apply and closes the door to potential 'top job' contenders.

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It must be noted that not hiring an individual based on a photo is by and large legal PROVIDED there is no discrimination.

employment due to gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, national origin, age, religion, disability, race, or color based on their photo, they may have a case. Employers risking potential bias and discrimina-

legal industry change, leave photos to LinkedIn. As a professional networking site, it's standard to include a quality photo as part of your profile. If an employer is interested in your resume, they'll likely do a social media check of you anyway, sometimes even before they call you in for an interview. And then they will see what you look like." **PM**

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There are exceptions. In the case of modeling or casting agencies, for example, where a certain "look" directly relates to the job, a call for applicant photos is a necessity. Even in these cases, however, rules apply. Applicants that require a photo cannot be singled out from those who do not.

Given both scenarios, if an applicant is certain they were refused

tion claims may be jeopardizing their professional and community standing. And one must also consider the resources necessary (time/money) to defend such a claim! For this reason, some employers purposefully de-select resumes that include photos for fear of liability.

Harvard Law School graduate and author Shauna C. Bryce sums it up this way: "Until norms in the



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