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## Can't cough up big bucks? Buy them bagels

Denver Business Journal - by [Stephanie Klein](#)

Few companies are in a position to offer great raises and big perks in this economy. That doesn't mean you're doomed to low morale and high turnover in the office. Workers aren't motivated by money alone. Many appreciate job perks — even the little ones.

Friday morning bagels, gift cards to the corner coffee shop, flexibility to take on new projects and other small gestures can make a job with a modest salary seem more satisfying and valuable.

In a recent survey by Watson Wyatt, employees most engaged and fulfilled at work perform 20 percent better than their peers and are 87 percent less likely to leave on their own. And companies with a lower turnover tend to outperform those with higher attrition.

Different perks will go over better in different workplaces. As a manager, you'll want to pick the ones that appeal to your workers (remember: it's always about them, not you) and fit the personality of your company.

Know what motivates your employees and give them the recognition they want.

Decide whether a perk should be broadcast or kept private. Before you set out for the bagel shop, here are some guidelines for picking out great perks:

**Know the purpose of the perk:** Are you trying to engage your employees to recommit or are you trying to say thank you? Are you recognizing a standout staffer or the whole team? Have a goal and make sure the goal helps you accomplish it.

**Expensive doesn't equal enjoyable:** Can't afford to take your team out to a bar for dinner and drinks even though they did a bang-up job on a big project? Plan a more modest appreciation dinner at the office. Order sandwiches and have one of your geekier young employees bring in a Wii or PlayStation. You'll have a blast singing video karaoke or playing Wii bowling for a few hours.

There's no guarantee it will be more fun than a night at the tavern on the company tab, but it's a way to let your employees enjoy themselves that won't break your budget.

**Food is fun, and they know it's not free:** Bringing in bagels on Friday is modest gesture, but a tangible perk. A dozen bagels in the morning means your employees can spend less on breakfast or lunch that day.

**A healthy suggestion:** Some job perks help make an employee's daily routine feel less like a daily grind. A pass to a local fitness center is a great perk on both ends. Your workers will get a free or discounted pass that lets them exercise. Plus, it shows them that you care about their health and well-being, rather than simply worrying about what they do at their desk all day.

This type of perk can be inexpensive (rec centers sometimes offer group discounts for participating companies) and can even help keep your employee health-plan costs in check.

**Early release:** A worker's time outside the office is always precious. At a time when staffing cuts at many companies force remaining employees to take on a larger workload, a little time away from the workplace may be the best gift you can give an employee. If an employee hustles on a particular project and racks up long hours, consider rewarding them with a few hours off on a Friday afternoon, or even a comp day.

**Acknowledge great work, then broadcast it:** Send out an email to your staff letting them know Joe did great work on a recent assignment. If Sue does an exemplary job on a project, offer her a chance to take the lead on an upcoming project that interests her. They'll see that you noticed all of their hard work. You'll demonstrate that your workplace is run by a manager who recognizes and acknowledges grade-A work from employees. And that's a pretty big perk in itself.

From an employer's standpoint, the best thing about these types of small benefits is they don't simply make your current employees happier. They become an enticement for the great job prospect you've been trying to lure. Maybe you can't pay them big bucks. You can, however, let them know that you run a workplace whose employees are valued and rewarded for their hard work.

That's the kind of company talented people want to be a part of. And when great talent is beating down your door because they heard you're a fun employer to work for, your current employees are less likely to consider jumping ship for one of your competitors.

*Stephanie Klein, president of the Colorado Human Resource Association, and president and CEO of the Boomer Group, a Denver staffing firm, can be reached at 303-300-6976.*

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