No-Cost Recognition Tips for 
Five Pillar Leaders

Recognition can be accomplished with many things, done many different ways. Some of the proven results of recognition:

- Builds employee loyalty and satisfaction
- Increases retention of employees
- Reinforces desired behavior
- Increases employee engagement
- Helps employees feel they are performing worthwhile work and making a difference

Try any of these no-cost /low cost recognition actions to recognize the hard work and commitment you see from your staff. Some have been adapted from other industries (see www.hrworld.com) and some are home-grown by our own Five Pillar Leaders.

1. **Flex those hours.** If there’s one free reward that rises above the rest, it’s flexible work schedules. Flex time as a perk offers the most gain with the least pain. This can go a long way to building trusting and mature relationships with key staff when most needed AND the workload permits.

2. **Send a handwritten note.** New Elevate thank you notes are available to all VUMC staff and faculty free of charge. Contact Vanderbilt Printing Services to order. The notes are available in sets of 25. Please send your delivery information. For more information on using thank you notes for recognition, click here. And consider this idea – ask your one up leader to write a personal note to employees who deserve a special recognition.

3. **Make work fun.** “I found employee morale to be way down,” said Terri Levine, president of The Coaching Institute. “We created a weekly event to boost morale. One week we asked everyone to bring in a baby picture, post it on a wall, then pick which person matched each picture. Everyone was having fun and socializing while productivity went from 58 percent to 72 percent — all in the same week.”

4. **Help them connect.** Introducing employees to key faculty, customers or someone in senior leadership can help make an employee’s day and it won't cost you a thing. Try this next time senior leaders round in your area.

5. **Send them to the showers.** “Every birth and wedding and other personal milestone deserves to be showered with recognition. Check out the life occasion cards at VUMC Recognition and make somebody’s day.”

6. **Reward effort as well as success.** Even if their ideas sometimes fail, you want employees to keep producing them, said Alan Weiss, president of the Summit Consulting Group Inc. “When I consulted with the CEO of Calgon, we created an annual award for 'the best idea that didn't work' and presented a loving cup at the annual awards dinner. This stimulated innovation and positive behavior, not 'winning'.”

7. **Dole out cream and sugar.** During the busiest times of the year, executives at the Cigna Group push carts around the office, serving drinks and refreshments to their colleagues, noted Steve Harrison, author of "The Manager's Book of Decencies: How Small Gestures Build Great Companies." As they serve, executives coach and thank their colleagues.
8. **Blow out the candles.** What about a monthly pot-luck birthday recognition for your team? Or a birthday break with beverages and cookies? Make sure to do a full year’s worth, so nobody is left out.

9. **Spread the love.** Ask co-workers to write something they truly like or admire about an employee on a scrap of paper, then frame them along with a photograph of the employee, suggested David Russell, author of *Success With People – A Complete System for Effectively Managing People in Any Organization.* What a terrific birthday gift for everyone.

10. **Offer a swap.** Giving your best employees a chance to pick their own projects or trade tasks with a colleague empowers and rewards them at the same time, according to HR World.

11. **Applaud their efforts — literally.** If someone has done something really worthwhile, have your entire staff give them a standing ovation at the next meeting, suggested Sharlyn Lauby, president of HR consulting firm ITM Group Inc.

12. **Say it with flowers.** Professor Linda M. Lopeke, principal of SmartStartCoach.com, said she used to reward top employees by bringing in flowers from her garden and arranging them in a spectacular crystal vase on their desks. “Everybody knew what having the custody of the flowers meant,” she said. “Surprisingly, even the men competed fiercely for custody of the flowers.” In the winter, she'd substitute a showpiece display of floating glass fish.

13. **Walk it as you talk it.** Want to help your team START? Use part of your staff meeting time for a walking meeting. You can follow any of the Health Plus paths around campus. [http://healthplus.vanderbilt.edu/](http://healthplus.vanderbilt.edu/) You can catch up on sharing information and may find that this multi-tasking is good for your health and your team.

14. **Share the memories.** Enlist a scrapbooking enthusiast or two to help recognize a colleague for those special Vanderbilt anniversaries. “My team created a scrapbook chronicling the impact I’d had. People who’d worked on my teams wrote testimonials and creative graphics highlighting some our team successes. It's the best gift I ever received in my 40-year career.”

15. **Elect them to the Wall of Fame.** Several experts suggested setting aside a public space inside your area and placing photos of employees who’ve accomplished something truly special, along with the details of what they did to earn their place on the wall. Keep it fresh with new faces and new accomplishments.

16. **Stoke their passion.** “Great employees want to enjoy their work, they want to be passionate about it ... if you want your employees to feel valued and inspire their passion on your behalf, encourage them to make their own decisions. You can have systems in place to control the implementation of ideas, but you must be certain not to compromise the enthusiasm, creativity and hard work that make them possible in the first place.” From Dr. R. Chang, CEO, Richard Chang Associates, Inc.

17. **Remember the secret words.** “The two most underused words in corporate America that get the highest ROI (return on investment) and ROT (return on your time) are the simple words ‘thank you,’” noted Michael Guld, president of the Guld Resource Group. While telling your employees you appreciate them should be obvious, no one does it enough or is specific enough about what the employee did. “So when you share your appreciation, be specific about what you really liked, so they not only feel appreciated but can do it again.”