Personal staff appreciation ideas

A thoughtful gesture starts with knowing the person. These fictional examples show how to connect a gift or experience to a real contribution or an occasion they have chosen to share.

A day out for the family

If they have told you they enjoy family days out, tickets to a local theme park or water park can make a generous thank-you. Let them choose the date and check how many tickets they need.

Fictional wording: “Sam, I appreciate the care you put into getting the team through this busy spell. I’d like to treat you and your family to a day at the water park. Would four tickets work for you? Choose a day that suits you and have some fun on us.”

Dinner taken care of

After an unusually long day, taking dinner off someone’s list can be a thoughtful gesture. Offer a takeaway from somewhere they enjoy and make payment simple.

Fictional wording: “Alex, thank you for the care you took finishing today’s work. It has been a long day. Pick up a takeaway on your way home, up to [agreed amount], and send me the receipt. Dinner is on us tonight.”

Flowers for a family occasion

A family anniversary or a child’s first birthday may be an occasion they would welcome you remembering. Flowers, a card or another suitable gift can carry your good wishes to the people at home.

Fictional wording: “Jamie, wishing you and your family a wonderful first birthday celebration. Please enjoy these flowers with our warmest wishes. We hope you have a lovely day together.”

A trip to the cinema

Cinema tickets can give someone an evening to look forward to. Ask which cinema works for them and let them choose the film and who they take.

Fictional wording: “Taylor, thank you for the thoughtful way you helped our new colleague settle in. I’d like to treat you to a cinema visit. Choose a film and take someone whose company you enjoy.”

Everyday gestures and milestones

Remember the person's interests and the moments that matter to them. Appreciation can reach beyond the workplace when the employee wants it to.

Their morning coffee covered

If coffee is part of their morning routine, a subscription or credit at their favourite café can feel more personal than a standard gift. A year of Panera Sip Club is one option where it fits the person and their local café.

Fictional wording: "Morgan, I notice how carefully you prepare for the day ahead. I know you enjoy your morning coffee, so I'd like to cover a coffee subscription for a year as a thank-you. Would that be something you'd use?"

Something connected to their interests

A bookshop voucher, a class or tickets to an event can show you listened. Use an interest they have shared rather than guessing what someone of their age or role should like.

Fictional wording: "Casey, I appreciated the clear handover you prepared. You mentioned you've been enjoying photography. Would a contribution towards a class interest you, or is there something else you'd enjoy more?"

A milestone worth remembering

An employee birthday, work anniversary or qualification can be a good moment to pause and acknowledge the person. Ask which occasions they would like remembered and whether they prefer quiet or shared recognition.

Fictional wording: "Riley, congratulations on earning your qualification. I know how much preparation you put into it. I'd love to mark the occasion in a way you'd enjoy—would you prefer a quiet lunch or a mention with the team?"

Time and attention without a purchase

A handwritten note, an unhurried conversation or following through on help you promised can matter. Thank the person specifically, listen and make time for what they need.

Fictional wording: "Lee, the care you put into those handover notes made the next steps clear. I appreciate it. You also asked for time to learn the new process; let's protect that time this week."

For any subscription, check current availability, benefits and renewal terms. Panera Sip Club details: panerabread.com/SipClub. Examples are suggestions, not endorsements or guaranteed results.

Staff appreciation planner

Choose a real contribution, a personal way to say thank you and a suitable moment. Use this sheet to plan one thoughtful act of appreciation.

Make time for what people did right.

Busy days should not mean that only mistakes receive attention. Say what you noticed, explain why you valued it and make clear what you would welcome again.

The contribution

What did the person do? Include only details you observed or have checked.

Why I appreciated it

What care, effort or judgment mattered? Include an effect only if you know it happened.

How this person prefers to be thanked

Private conversation, handwritten note, team mention or another agreed approach.

What I will arrange

Name the gesture, any approved budget, who will arrange it and when. Include colleagues on other shifts or locations where relevant.

Milestones they would like acknowledged

Optional: employee or child birthdays, family or work anniversaries, qualifications. Ask what they would welcome; keep dates and preferences private.

A thoughtful gesture sits alongside fair pay, manageable work and practical support. Ask what the person would value. Keep completed planning notes private.

Write a personal thank you

Use these prompts to put a real contribution into your own words. You can leave the outcome out when you do not know it.

A starting point

Thank you, [name], for [specific action]. I appreciated [the care, effort or judgment you noticed].

If you observed an effect, add: It helped [person or team] by [what actually happened].

Fictional example

“Jordan, thank you for walking our new colleague through the equipment checklist and leaving time for questions.”

Adapt the approach to something that happened. Avoid claims about time saved or problems prevented unless you know they are true.

My message

Write it as you would say it. Keep praise separate from a request for more work.

The right time and audience

How does the colleague prefer to receive thanks? If customer praise is involved, confirm the wording and audience before sharing.

Before sharing: check names and facts; remove private details; confirm the audience; choose a safe moment. Internal sharing permission does not automatically cover a public testimonial.

Recognition preferences

A thank-you should feel comfortable and meaningful to the person receiving it.

Ask the colleague to complete this with you or in their own time. Every answer is optional, and preferences can change. Keep the responses private and use them to guide how you recognize good work.

Name _____ Date _____

How do you prefer to be thanked

Privately in person, in a personal message, or in a team setting after checking with you? Something else?

What makes recognition meaningful to you

For example, a specific explanation of what helped, a handwritten note, customer feedback or an opportunity to learn.

Whose feedback matters to you

Your manager, teammates, customers or someone else? It is fine to have no preference.

What would you rather avoid

Consider surprises, public attention or particular kinds of gifts and celebrations.

Which work milestones would you like acknowledged

For example, completing training or a work anniversary. No family details or personal dates are needed.

How should we check before sharing more widely

Agree the audience and the particular name, photo or story each time. This sheet is not blanket publicity permission.

Manager reminder: recognize dependable everyday work as well as standout moments. Be timely, specific and sincere. Offer only gestures or opportunities you can provide fairly.

Three week recognition reflection

Use three weeks to practice noticing contributions across your team. This is a reflection aid, not a target for posts, gifts or compliments.

In his conference session, Graham challenged managers to write three recognition notes a week for three weeks. Use that as a prompt to notice real work; never invent praise to fill a quota.

Look across the working week

Week	Work I may be overlooking	What I will pay attention to
1		
2		
3		

Consider office and field roles, different shifts, routine preparation, careful handoffs and colleagues who help others learn. Keep personal notes private.

What felt meaningful

What did colleagues say they valued? Did the timing and audience suit them?

What I will change

Whose work needs more attention? What support have I promised, and when will I follow through?

Review date _____ Next check in _____

Three weeks is an optional practice period, not a promise of improved retention or productivity. Recognition should sit alongside fair pay, manageable work and time away from the job.