



# How to Reward Staff for Outstanding Behavior Without Breaking the Bank

By Howard Riell

In a business in which service consistency and quality can make or break you, high-quality employees may well be a restaurant's most valuable feature. And in a business in which margins are tight and you have to watch every penny, rewarding top performers isn't always easy.

There's the rub. Still, you want your best and brightest to stay and be happy.

The good news is operators needn't break the bank to accomplish this. In fact, there are rewards that are equally if not more important to staff members than cash. For owners, creativity and personal touch in this regard can go a long way.

## Wish List

"When I operated my own restaurants and had very little cash flow I knew I had to be creative

with rewarding and retaining my staff in a creative, low-cost manner," says veteran restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel, FCSI, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. "So when I hired them, I asked them to create a 'wish list' of things they wanted in three tiers: \$50, \$100, \$150. I kept each wish list in the employee's personal files. Some of the 'wishes' were movie tickets, sneakers, dinner out, flowers, days off, attendance at a trade show; and even additional 'free' uniforms."

As the employees were "caught in the act of doing something special," or after a particularly successful week or month, Spiegel would go into the "wish list" files and grant their personal wishes. "Of course, each gift matched the relevant tier in dollar amount (and came with) a personal, handwritten note from me. As it turns out, after years of keeping in touch with former staff, the personal notes had the most sustainable value."