



The Osborne Coinage Co.
2851 Massachusetts Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45225
TEL (800)488-2646 (513)681-5424
FAX (513)681-5604

This Employee Recognition Program is a Grand Slam!



Cincinnati, OH – Recognition and incentive programs can be a real challenge – especially for seasonal employees (many of whom are part-time). But Sportservice of Chicago, which manages the concessions and retail at Chicago’s U.S. Cellular Field, home of the Chicago White Sox, has established a program that’s a real home run. The GuestPath process incents employees to provide superior guest service along a number of measurable metrics, and rewards them with immediate recognition as well as longer-term special events. Both managers and employees alike agree that this program is a real winner – a veritable grand slam.

Managers who witness commendable guest service can reward an employee on-the-spot with custom coins. The coins, which are worth 1, 5 or 20 points, can be used to buy raffle chances on big prizes (like a 46-inch flat-screen TV) at the end-of-year “Thank You” party. All 1,100 Sportservice employees are involved in this rewards program, and based on feedback they seem to love it.

“Last year (2008) was the first year that we’ve used the coins,” said Katie Small. “It has worked really well. The coins have much more of an instant reward – which is what we were looking for.”

The coins are minted in 3 different denominations – each color coded to quickly determine what the point level is. Silver coins are worth 1 point – and are the most commonly used for rewards & recognition. Blue coins, which are worth 5 points are the next most popular denomination, and gold coins – worth 20 points – are the rarest.

Prior to using the coins, the program worked with “punch cards.” Managers who witnessed a commendable act would punch an employee’s card. The punched cards were used to purchase raffle tickets – just as the coins are – but the coins have more impact. One reason might be because the coins have more or a perceived value than a punch card. And coins are more like real money – they clink and jingle just like real change.

Before every shift, managers fill their pockets with coins of all denominations and sharpen their eyes to catch their employees doing things right. And because the coins have different denominations, managers use their judgment to reward employees for their guest service with varying levels of value. The effect has been noticeable to managers and employees, but most importantly to the guests whom they are here to serve.

What’s In a Name?

Part of the training that each employee undergoes is to use the guest’s name in the concession stand at the ballpark. If the guest pays for a transaction with a credit card, or submits an ID for an alcoholic beverage, the employee can then use the guest’s name when returning the credit card, ID, or the purchased items. Managers who witness this happening can give the employee one or more coins.

No Mystery Here

The GuestPath process also works well with other programs such as “Secret Shopper” and others. “We have an independent company come in and shop us to our GuestPath standards” said Ashley Noel of Sportservice

Cincinnati. “If an employee is shopped and scores 100% we’ll give them a gift certificate for our appreciation, but also some tokens.”

Even aside from the secret shoppers, employees can earn big-time token rewards for guest service that is, well, WOW. “If an employee receives a guest compliment, or if an employee goes above and beyond in the line of duty, we would WOW them, and give them tokens at the highest levels. For instance, if an employee helps a special needs child carry his pizza and soft-drink to his seat, a manager can recognize them on the spot” continued Noel.

Durable for Use Season after Season

A key benefit to the program, from a manager’s perspective, is that the coins are durable and can be re-used time and again. Once an employee purchases raffle tickets with his coins, those same coins go back into circulation to reward other employees. Re-circulating the coins keeps expenses down, and eliminates the need to keep track of punch cards and when to re-order them.

Short-Term Rewards for Long-Term Benefits

Catching employees being good and rewarding that desired behavior is a short term reward – which will hopefully reap long term benefits (continued similar actions that form habits). To keep morale high all season long and to keep employees striving to do their best, Sportservice stages periodic raffles – which ultimately builds up to a huge year-end raffle.

The earlier season raffles might feature prizes like pens and t-shirts to \$100 gift cards. Raffle chances typically start low – maybe 2 tokens – early in the season. As time progresses, however, the prizes get larger and so does the number of tokens required for a chance on the prize. The end-of-season raffle event is by far the biggest of

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the season – with the largest and most varied prizes. The higher the prize value, the higher level of tokens required for a raffle ticket.

“Last year we had a 46-inch TV as the major prize” recalls Small, “which required quite a few tokens – 15 tokens for raffle chance.”

Another improvement planned for this year is a “company store” where employees can purchase items with their tokens rather than waiting for a chance to win prizes. At press time, with just a single home stand under their belt, the Sportservice team had not yet implemented the store.

While designing recognition and reward programs for part-time seasonal employees can be a challenge, when done properly, it can reap benefits for all those involved. Clearly that is the case Sportservice Chicago which registered a 92% during their most recent “Secret Shop.” The highest score in several years, this can largely be attributed to the GuestPath process that has been in place during that time. Rewarding good behavior with a tangible reminder is important for both employees and managers, but most importantly for the guests whom they serve at the ballpark.

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About Osborne Coinage:

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