12 GAME-CHANGING IDEAS FOR YEARS OF SERVICE PROGRAMS
What comes to mind when you think about years of service anniversaries? Is it an engraved lead crystal vase gathering dust in a hall closet? Is it a rejected catalog full of generic luggage and knock-off electronics? Perhaps it is a certificate or letter addressed to “dear employee”?
Four out of five companies give years of service or milestone anniversary awards—but along the way most of them have become entitlement programs that no one is very excited about. Not even you.

In our 2014 Workforce Mood Tracker Report, we asked people how they felt about their last anniversary award. More than half said receiving it ‘changed nothing at all.’ That’s 50% of your years of service (YOS) budget that is being wasted. And that’s more than half of your employees who are not being reached by your milestone efforts.

The sad fact is, service awards haven’t changed in fifty years—and their frayed edges are really starting to show. They focus on the wrong things. We offer them out of habit and they don’t make the impact they should. We can do better.
YEARS OF SERVICE CAN DO BETTER

We think anniversary awards should be as impactful and vibrant as your employees are. We think that if they are not inspiring your employees, you’re missing a huge opportunity. We think they should be something employees love, and that you love.

So where do we start?
Here are a dozen disruptive ideas to help you build an innovative, inspiring anniversary experience. Ask yourself:

1. Is your anniversary experience too isolating?

Many employees celebrate milestones alone or not at all. They may get a nod from a manager, a letter of congratulations, or a catalog of dusty reward options. A career that has been rich with camaraderie, group achievements, and the voices of coworkers rolls up into that one lonely moment with an empty envelope.

Imagine your milestone experience included the voices of all of your work friends and colleagues from your entire career with the company.

Imagine that each award also celebrated the community around you, and really reminded you why you’ve stayed all those years.

Service Timelines surround you with the attention and appreciation of your community.

2. Are they disappointing?

One thing we hear over and over from employees is their dissatisfaction with the quality of years of service awards. “Thank you very little” seems to be a tagline for disappointing reward programs that fall flat. When programs have no interactive community involvement, they are forced to focus solely on the award or gift. This invites employees to think transactionally about their service—and let’s face it, even a top tier token gift will rarely compensate for years of hard work. Sadly, those rewards are rarely top tier. They are usually chosen from an out-of-date catalog with very little individual appeal. In fact, such legacy programs can result in as much as 25-30% of awards going unredeemed. That’s up to nearly a third of employees who are un-reached, and probably strongly disappointed with your program.

Imagine you could make your reward resonate more by actually choosing it yourself—not from an out-of-date catalog, but from a virtually unlimited collection of brand-name merchandise.

Imagine that reward was not the focus, but only one small part of your milestone experience—with the real focus on stories, videos and a reflection of your contribution through the eyes of your colleagues.

Service Timelines are actually exciting, touching and rewarding to receive.
Who is actually issuing your service awards?

One of the biggest missed opportunities in service awards comes with the return address. Awards are too often issued from companies, in envelopes with no name but the recipient’s. Studies show that people work harder for coworkers and leaders they care about. If we’re looking to build affective commitment to our organizations—we must never forget—or allow our employees to forget—that an organization is made up of people.

Imagine service awards and stories that came from every direction—incorporating the vantage point of senior leaders, managers and co-workers alike.

Imagine getting an award that was not just an award presentation, but an entire multimedia celebration experience, focused on your unique career retrospective.

Service Timelines come from your work circles, not from a form.

Are your years of service awards personal enough?

It is shocking how many milestone awards are addressed to “dear valued employee”. Adding a name is a great start. But milestone awards should not just be personalized, they should be personal. You have an opportunity to stop and reflect on the unique contributions someone has made to your company. Wasting it with form letters and cookie cutter awards seems not only a waste, but some employees even see it an insult.

Imagine service awards that were not only personalized, but entirely unique to you—including details on your career and your experiences.

Imagine if your peers could add their memories of you and their impressions of your unique impact on your company.

Service Timelines offers each employee a unique experience based on the details of their career and contributions.
Do your awards have an actual lasting impact?

A celebratory lunch fits into 45 minutes. A call out at an award banquet lasts until the applause dies. A pat on the back is lost five minutes after it happens. The last thing you want from a milestone experience is for it to be ephemeral and easily forgotten. Isn’t the very idea to mark this moment indelibly, inspire that employee, and renew their commitment in a lasting way? Yet so many milestone moments pass in a moment and without making an impact.

Imagine an anniversary experience that lasts longer than a few minutes or a day, and goes on creating an impact for long after the event.

Imagine you could add to that moment over time—revisiting, reminiscing over, and renewing every time someone contributes a memory or adds a congratulations.

Service Timelines encourage multiple visits and renew commitment over time.

Are your awards sensitive enough to your actual work culture?

Today’s multi-cultural companies—whether or not they span international borders—have to be much more careful and sensitive to cultural differences than years ago. One size rarely fits all these anymore. Are you implementing someone else’s idea of a meaningful experience, or are your messages coming from within your culture? What worked for a largely homogenous population twenty or fifty years ago no longer works in our diverse modern workplaces. Yet legacy years of service is often trying to cram everyone into the same box, with the same celebration and the same rewards. The traditional gift of a clock—common in many of our grandfather’s recognition platforms—is a strongly taboo insult in some cultures. It is essential to maintain efficiencies of scale and equity, but still create flexibility and room for our individual cultures.

Imagine flexibility and choice were built into your reward and milestone programs, allowing you to make your own choices (and avoiding inadvertent faux pas).

Imagine the employee milestone experience was defined by your unique work circle, and therefore perfectly calibrated to your needs and your culture.

Service Timelines are created from and sensitive to your unique work culture.
Some awards for tenure become less a celebration of effort and more something to check off a box and thank employees for not quitting. Somehow, in the volume of awards we give, we too often forget why we’re doing it in the first place. Or who we are celebrating. We get in the stale habit of just issuing awards and we lose the celebration to the routine. We need to rekindle our mutual romance with our employees, and put the meaning back into the message.

Imagine a milestone that made you feel even more important to your company, because instead of boilerplate, you read specific references to your unique impact and value.

Imagine a milestone that brought together everyone you’ve ever worked with, to show you what your service has meant to the company’s success.

Service Timelines are never perfunctory.

Some managers are great at making employees feel important and valued. But some managers are—how can we put this nicely—a little “appreciation challenged.” They are great at managing work, but have trouble when it comes to expressing thanks for years of service. Many legacy-style programs depend almost entirely on a manager’s ability to create a memorable milestone experience. This creates a catastrophic point of potential failure, where employees with great managers have a great milestone experience and those who don’t… don’t.

Imagine a whole community rallying around years of service, and eliminating the manager-only potential failure point.

Imagine managers feeling less stress around milestones because the experience is mutually owned by the employee’s peers, former managers, and company leadership.

Service Timelines takes the pressure off the manager alone.
Is your service anniversary program driving business results?

This is a question that isn’t asked nearly often enough about years of service programs. Someone, somewhere signs a check every quarter and no one looks too closely at what is usually a pretty big ticker budget item. Why? Usually because those legacy programs aren’t actually moving the needle in any appreciable way. Years of service programs must be accountable for moving your key business metrics.

Imagine a years of service program with measurable, reportable metrics to show impact, reach and breadth.

Imagine using a recognition program to tie milestones back to important HR metrics like engagement and retention.

Service Timelines help move the needle on your business goals.

How does your years of service program relate to the HR big picture?

In the old world, we could operate HR programs each in their own vacuum. In the new world, every program needs to integrate with, share resources with, and support your entire HCM strategy. If your YOS program is still operating under the old world order, consider an approach which merges it with your other recognition and promotion efforts. You will save money and can use each program to enrich the other.

Imagine milestone programs that share data with and integrate with your recognition programs—allowing you to offer a career retrospective that celebrates past successes and achievements.

Imagine leveraging efficiencies by running a single program for employee appreciation, rather than duplicating multiple efforts.

Service Timelines work with and support your broader HR strategy.
Is your program leveraging the latest technology?

Is your program doing anything it couldn’t have done in 1965? If the answer is “not really,” than you should rethink your program. Advances in the last few years have made modern milestone programs more agile and flexible—with SaaS, cloud-based technology and the ability to access functionality over mobile apps. They’ve also taken us leaps and bounds in collecting data from these programs to share with other areas of our business.

Imagine accessing your milestone program online or on your phone, to share and read messages, congratulate, and redeem an award on the go.

Imagine sharing data from your YOS solution to inform other business processes.

Service Timelines employs state-of-the-art mobile, social and SaaS technology.

Are your awards an unnecessary burden?

There’s no reason administration of a milestone program should be a burden. Yet, too often they are. For one thing, with old-school warehouse-based YOS, there can be unnecessary complications about fulfillment of gifts—where gifts can take months to arrive and returns are common. To add to this, we also tend to automate in the wrong places, producing assembly line awards and placing the responsibility for remembering on over-loaded admins or forgetful managers. In fact, remembering the anniversary should be automatic and seamless, and it should be made simple and easy for managers to respond with their own message of thanks and congratulations.

Imagine milestone programs that actually remember anniversaries for you, knows who is in an employee’s work circle and sends out automatic invitations and reminders for co-workers to participate in the celebration.

Imagine no anxiety about the choices of delivery of reward items, and you could rely on stress-free and timely arrival of gifts.

Service Timelines automatically issues invitations and reminders, lifting the burden on admins and managers.

Learn more at www.globoforce.com/servicetimelines
THE REAL GAME-CHANGER: GLOBOFORCE SERVICE TIMELINES™

Globoforce gets that what really matters about service awards isn’t certificates or awards. It is relationships, commitment, and inspiration. That’s why our product isn’t focused on awards.

Instead, we’ve created an anniversary experience.
At Globoforce, we think differently.

What if you could assemble a career retrospective to illuminate the years of contribution that your employee has dedicated to your company? That’s what Globoforce Service Timelines does. This multimedia experience reminds all of your workers of the strong community they have created together—reinforcing ties to managers, peers, and your company values through inspiring stories, images and congratulations.

Our anniversary celebration also culminates in the choice of an award to commemorate the moment—a choice based on what will be meaningful and lasting for each employee.

And because this solution is driven by an automated infrastructure with advanced analytics, native mobile app availability and global support, you can be certain that the experience will be accessible, equitable and compliant with regulations. And a future-proofed SaaS platform means that our technology will continue to grow, evolve and engage your changing workforce—everywhere in the world.
CONGRATULATIONS!
Experience Service Timelines for yourself and reimagine the years of service experience.

Contact us for a demonstration.