

alternatives to increasing employees' salaries.

alternative benefits to offer employees when a salary increase isn't in the budget.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit many Canadian businesses hard, leading to huge drops in revenue across a large swath of industries. A significant number of employers are facing shrinking budgets in the post-pandemic landscape. With limited funds available to reward employees for their tireless efforts during the pandemic, businesses must get creative and rethink how they show appreciation to their core employees.

Businesses simply can't afford to lose their trusted, experienced employees right now. That means going above and beyond to take care of employees and finding alternative ways to reward them for their hard work and dedication. Our research shows that a bump in their salary remains the most attractive option to employees in Canada. However, when raises and bonuses simply aren't in the cards, there are some alternative benefits you can offer that show your employees that their work is valued.

the changing nature of workplace benefits

In the pandemic era, many traditional workplace perks have become obsolete due to remote work and physical distancing guidelines. We're talking about social events, in-office snacks, on-site childcare and a decked-out employee lounge complete with comfy sofas and entertainment. With these benefits off the table, it's become more challenging to differentiate from other employers. Here are alternatives we've been seeing pop up.

flexible hours

If you're going to offer just one thing on this list, make it this one. Even while working remotely, employees appreciate flexible work hours. They still have to care for the kids, run errands, cook and clean, and manage their personal time. For employees who are still reporting to your workplace, this benefit is even more important. Being flexible about shifts and start times allows employees to choose work hours when their commute will be less busy, coordinate schedules with their spouse, or arrange for childcare.

additional vacation days

During the pandemic many employees are working harder than ever. Workers in retail, healthcare and other essential industries that have been swamped are working long, hard hours. For remote workers, the lines between work and home life have been blurred. These factors lead to more burnout and stress among workers. Offering bonus vacation days and other forms of time off are much appreciated. Also encourage your employees to take time

off, even if they're just planning a staycation on their couch. Often there's an expectation that 'doing nothing' is not a valid excuse to take a vacation. With the stress of the pandemic weighing on everyone, that downtime is much-needed mental break.

extended lunches or early fridays

If you can't offer full-days off due to business needs, you can offer other smaller time-off perks such as ending work an hour early one day a week. Friday is a popular choice, as many businesses experience slower Fridays and employees always appreciate an early start to the weekend. Other alternatives include offering one late-start day per week for employees to sleep in, offering extended lunch hours, or an extra 30-minute break each day for employees to indulge in a personal activity such as working out, reading, taking a class to alleviate the stresses of pandemic life.

paid internet and phone

Working from home requires employees to use their own phone and internet to communicate with customers and colleagues. Offering to pay for some or all of employees' phone and internet expenses is a great perk for remote employees. It helps offset some of the costs of working at home. Employees who struggle with a poor quality Internet connection can upgrade to a higher quality service and increase productivity.

office equipment and tech devices

Employees need to have certain equipment to do their job. While many companies provide basics like a company computer and smartphone, going above and beyond to provide extras like multiple monitors, an ergonomic chair, a keyboard, headphones, etc. are a welcome bonus that will also increase productivity and can be written off as a business expense. If you have an agreement in place with an office supplier, you can work out sending a package to all your employees who work remotely. However you could also consider providing an office equipment allowance to ensure all your people have access to purchase the equipment they need and have some freedom to choose options that meet their personal preferences.

free lunch or snack boxes

Free food and snacks have been a standard office perk for years. Fortunately, you can still offer it. Sending employees snack boxes has become one of the most popular office perks in the work from home era. Many companies are offering all types of snack boxes. You can also send gift cards for lunch, coffee, and other popular office treats.

virtual gym memberships

Access to a company gym or a discount on gym memberships has been a popular way to promote health and wellness for your employees. With gyms closed, but slowly opening up, this perk is not as popular. As an alternative, you can offer virtual gym memberships to your employees. You can offer funds to access online yoga, workout, and exercise programs.

digital subscriptions

Offering access to digital subscriptions is a great modern perk. Employees can access an array of music, movies, TV shows, audio books, podcasts, meditation and mindfulness programs. During the pandemic, Canadians' social lives and sources for entertainment have migrated online. So these services can be a thoughtful way to reward employees with something they'll actually use. As an added bonus, many of these programs can also promote professional development. For example, for a marketing agency, employees could get digital subscriptions to the best marketing podcasts, audiobooks and other resources.

wellness and mental health programs

The health and wellness of your employees is paramount. This is particularly the case today as many are transitioning to a new work from home environment and dealing with the stresses of an uncertain future. Wellness programs can offer your employees the support they need.

Working from home changes how employees work. The type of benefits and perks employees find useful has changed. Shift the type of benefits you offer to employees to attract new talent and keep your team happy as they work from home.