EMPRAXISHQ

T3 Rewards field guide

A practical guide to personalizing recognition through Time, Talent, and Treasure, and what to do when someone says you can't.

Measure what matters.
Model what works.
Reward what improves.

WHY T3 REWARDS EXISTS

"Employee loyalty comes from a sense of community accepting of individuality, the daily work itself, and constant reminders that what employees do matters... money is a distant fourth."

ROSABETH MOSS KANTER

T3 Rewards exists because money was never the main thing. Time, Talent, and Treasure builds her first three, and keeps money in the mix as Treasure. It just isn't the lever that holds.

FOR OWNERS & MANAGERS

Your people told you what they want. Don't let a policy get in the way.

You've mapped what your people actually want. Now someone is pushing back, HR, finance, or a direct report's manager. Here's how every version of that conversation ends.

THE OBJECTIONS, AND THE STRAIGHT COUNTER

- *"I can't afford to lose someone for a day."*
  If one absence threatens operations, that's a staffing problem T3 didn't create. It just made the problem visible. Cross-training is the fix, not withholding recognition.
- *"If I give it to one, everyone will expect it."*
  T3 is personalized, not uniform. Some people want time off. Others want a certification. When recognition is individualized, comparison is apples and oranges.
- *"There's never a good time."*
  Reward is earned in the moment, redeemed on a schedule. A comp day usable within 90 days costs nothing operationally. It just requires a calendar.
- *"Payroll still runs. It's not really free."*
  SHRM estimates that losing the person costs six to nine months of their salary in recruiting and onboarding. One paid day off is a rounding error next to replacement cost.
- *"They'll use it to interview somewhere else."*
  Employees who feel seen are less likely to look, not more. If your first instinct when rewarding someone is that they'll leave, that's a culture signal worth examining.

> *"You're not giving away a day. You're making a deposit in the one account that determines whether this person is still here next year."*

One flag worth naming: Managers who fear giving time off often don't fully trust their people. T3 won't fix a broken trust relationship, but it will surface one.

FOR HR & FINANCE

The payroll requirement is real. Most of T3 doesn't touch it.

The objection is a Treasure objection. It lives in one of three T3 categories. Time and Talent are almost entirely unaffected, and for most employees, one of those two is their primary recognition language.

THE T3 FRAMEWORK, WHAT REQUIRES PAYROLL AND WHAT DOESN'T

TIME	**Does not touch payroll.** Extra PTO, a comp day, a flexible Friday, washing an employee's car, or volunteering at their favorite nonprofit. These are gifts of time, not compensation items.
TALENT	**Does not touch payroll.** Certifications, conferences, courses, books, and tuition reimbursement. These are business expenses routed through L&D or professional development budgets.
TREASURE	**This is where the objection lives.** Four paths exist. See below.

FOUR TREASURE PATHS WHEN PAYROLL IS REQUIRED

1. **Run it through payroll and own it.** A grossed-up bonus so the employee nets the full amount is still meaningful. Be transparent: *"We're covering the tax so you get the full value."*
2. **Choose tangible gifts over gift cards.** The IRS treats cash-equivalent items as taxable. A physical item tied to their T3 answers (gear for their hobby, a book for their craft) is different and often more memorable.
3. **Use experiences instead of currency.** A company-paid dinner, event tickets, or a half-day experience carries a different tax treatment than a check, and honors exactly what T3 is built on: specificity.
4. **Let the Merit Map guide you.** If their Time and Talent answers are vivid and their Treasure answers are vague, you already know where their primary language is. Use it.

> *"T3 isn't compensation. It's communication. Most of the time, it doesn't cost a dollar, and it never touches payroll."*

Tax treatment varies by circumstance and jurisdiction. Consult your tax advisor on de minimis fringe benefit thresholds before implementing. This is not legal or tax advice.