

# Convenience Benefits-How about Tax Prep Assistance?

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Convenience benefits are an easy way to boost morale and also to meet some of the “life activity” challenges of your staff. When done right, they are inexpensive and easy to manage.

## What are convenience benefits?

Convenience benefits are the little perks that can be a helpful supplement to your formal (and costly!) benefit program. Your defined benefit program usually includes health/dental coverage, PTO/vacation/sick programs, retirement, 401(k), tuition reimbursement, etc. These are a major expense to the organization and require HR resources to manage.

Convenience benefits, on the other hand, are provided at little or no cost and require very little investment in managing. These benefits are often provided by outside firms. They may include payroll deduction for auto/home insurance, discount programs for local businesses, gym memberships, and other varied perks.

At one hospital, an automobile repair firm would bring a large semi onto the parking lot and do oil changes and other minor repairs while the employee was at work. Employees loved not having to drop their cars at service providers and then arrange for transportation to and from work.

At another facility, a massage therapist was on-site once a week and conducted 15 minute chair massages for staff at a reduced rate. Caregivers working 12 hour shifts loved this perk.

## Stand Apart

Do convenience benefits make a difference? When our hospital was named as the best place to work in the state, some of the convenience benefits were listed as

the reason. Chair massages, harp music, and the other “soft” benefits set us apart from the competition.

Your employees expect the major benefits that you provide and I would suggest that the organization must provide them in order to compete. However, it is all the additional perks you provided that help define your culture and make you different from the others.

We have always provided as many of these perks as possible. We had a couple of rules: (1) The perk had to be provided at little or no cost, (2) it had to require little or no HR management, (3) Had to have value to a number of our employees. (Since there is little cost or time involved, these can be provided to even a small subset of employees.)

## A Taxing Benefit

What seasonal convenience benefit might be applied now? No, I am not thinking of the end of winter, or the advent of spring. I am thinking of *Tax Reporting Season*.

A surprising number of your employees are totally mystified by the challenge of submitting tax returns. They may qualify for the simplest tax forms, but still have questions and have difficulty in completing it. Questions arise regarding address/status changes. Some employees have spouses now receiving Social Security benefits and may be surprised that this is taxable. Others don't know what form they should use.

How about providing a day for tax information? In our experience, many tax assistance firms are happy to provide someone to answer basic questions. We put a table outside of our cafeteria, and it was busy all day. The firms are happy to do this as they often generate additional business with more complex tax issues that surface.

Another source is college students (often accounting) who have completed coursework on tax policy. Senior citizen centers often use them to assist members and they might be happy to provide this to your organization. Your employees get information and the students get experience!

Make it a fun event! Many of your staff will be grateful for the assistance.

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