



Driving employee behavior change through recognition

Employee recognition strategies for a connected culture

Team members simply want to be seen

We all want to be recognized and appreciated for our hard work. So much so that lack of praise is the reason 79% of people quit their jobs, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

What does recognition feel like in your organization?

Here are questions to ask yourself that may unearth what's working and what could be better.

- > Do employees feel connected, motivated and appreciated?
- > Is the recognition experience personalized and meaningful?
- > Are we maximizing our investment and using data to inform program optimization?

Chances are, there's room to improve and things you haven't considered before, especially with a long-standing program.

The world of work is rapidly evolving, and your recognition strategy is a sign of how "with the times" your organization is.



Retaining and engaging employees is the top priority for 60% of CEOs.

—CHIEF EXECUTIVE GROUP

5-step road map strategy



STEP 1

Gain
C-suite
buy-in



STEP 2

Establish
performance
goals



STEP 3

Prepare
for
rollout



STEP 4

Launch
and
sustain



STEP 5

Measure
and
modify

The case for creating buy-in

For those who already buy in to a recognition program, investing in it further is a no-brainer. But budgeting for a technology platform, manager support and ongoing communications can feel like too big of an obstacle when C-suite leaders don't know how truly manageable it can be. The best pitch? What a recognition program does in return for the organization.

Tie data to organizational needs

A strong recognition program makes gratitude front and center, which flows into how team members perform, collaborate and show up in their roles. There are a couple of ways to tell this story to leadership—through industry case studies or an internal employee survey.

The data shows that recognition supports outcomes like:

Decreased turnover

Increased engagement

Stronger organization culture

Increased productivity

Reduced absenteeism

Communicate your vision

Beyond sharing what a recognition program can do, explain how it would uniquely serve your organization.

Help leaders see what recognition would mean to different demographics—from new hires and tenured team members to client-facing roles and deskless workers.

Establish a measurement plan

This goes hand in hand with creating a case for buy-in. New technology makes it easier to measure employee recognition output, which also makes it easier to get budget support from C-suite leaders who want to know the ROI.

Defining success for your unique program

As you're launching a new program or rolling out major updates post-launch, think about how you'll define success 60, 120 and 365 days after launch.

Ask the following questions.

- > What targets should be set for each KPI?
- > How should the data be segmented?
- > Should each audience segment have the same goals?
- > How will the program support leaders with actionable insights, based on real-time results?



Evaluate business and cultural goals

Effective recognition programs reflect an organization's business goals and core values. If your core values have been in place for several years, get a pulse check from your employees.

Do the values still resonate? Are they reflective of the brand?

Understanding recognition issuance among core values

Before you start gathering employee feedback, look at recognition data to see how employee recognition issuance is distributed across your core values—and how frequently. If one or two core values make up a significant portion of your recognition activity, it might be a sign that less-used values don't resonate (even if they did previously).

Data will help you answer these questions.

- > Do employees understand the behaviors tied to the core values?
- > Is it time to refresh the core values?
- > Should we promote sending more recognition?

Refresh core values when it's time (you'll know)

If your established goals don't reflect current brand messaging as proven by program data, change up the goals. In other words: Does recognition issuance vary among your core values with some being significantly less used? Identify the specific employee behaviors necessary to drive organizational health.

For example, safety is essential for manufacturing and retail organizations, so identifying key behaviors tied to safety helps employees feel secure and improve productivity.



CORE VALUES SHAPE RECOGNITION

Your core values and business goals are your friends when designing and implementing a recognition program. Remember, recognition can take many forms to best align with your values.

Time the rollout with planned company events

Coordinating the rollout with events like a quarterly town hall or annual company meeting naturally builds awareness and excitement. Or launch during relevant events like Employee Appreciation Day (March) or National Gratitude Month (November).

Don't forget to account for your company's busy season, too. For example, a retail company shouldn't launch a new internal program during the hectic holiday shopping season.



Define employee personas

There's no such thing as an average workday, even when comparing roles within the same department. So how you engage employees depends on your ability to adapt to their needs. And really, how it makes them feel. Understanding what causes employees' stress and what eases their workload creates a culture that best serves them.

Personalizing recognition per role type

People expect personalization within every part of their lives, including the employee experience. When, why and how each role earns recognition and awards is part of personalization.

Through persona research and development, you'll uncover what employees' daily life is really like. With the output of that research, you can define a profile for each specific employee segment and their work experience (i.e., function, location, motivation and pain points) and use it to design, communicate and execute a more effective recognition program.



When, why and how people send recognition matters

Sales Executive

- > A mix of deskless, office-based and remote work
- > Manages client and team relationships that could demand them to "wear a variety of hats"
- > Takes work with them wherever they go, even after hours

Front-Line Retail Worker

- > Typically deskless or face-to-face with customers
- > Juggles multiple tasks that may take a physical toll on their body
- > Leaves work at work

Communicate effectively

The average person's attention span is eight seconds—less than most YouTube ads, according to the American Psychological Association. (The average attention span in 2004 was 2.5 minutes.)

When vying for employees' attention, you'd better do two things.

1. Make the message clear—the simpler and shorter the better
2. Repeat it through different communication channels, including email and company-wide updates

Understand which messages employees need to hear

This is where your employee persona work (on the previous page) can really benefit you. Communicating to a sales executive will likely look and feel different than communicating to a retail employee. Deskless workers may not even have a corporate email address, so tactics such as breakroom posters, postcards mailed to their home or texting might be more effective.

Realize who sends it matters

Have the CEO and other key leaders record a brief video message about how important recognition and your core values are to them and the organization. Their authority makes employees take notice and shows alignment at the highest level. But remember: While leaders can help with reinforcement, using that as your only means of communication will create an inconsistent employee experience.



24%

of employees say the most memorable recognition comes from the CEO.

—GALLUP

Create a recognition challenge

A simple recognition challenge is an effective way to focus on the behaviors you want to drive, send more timely recognition and build sustainable habits (we often recommend one recognition per week for six weeks). For some, sending recognition is a step outside their comfort zone. Share examples of meaningful recognition in your communications to help employees understand how certain behaviors tie to specific core values.

Peer recognition fills gaps that manager recognition can't reach

While managers set the tone for employee engagement, research shows employees dually crave and appreciate recognition from their peers.

Think of times when employees don't have an opportunity for regular contact with their manager. They might be working remotely or in a retail environment where their schedules don't often overlap with their manager. **That means an employee's peers often have more exposure to their performance than managers do, and can send more genuine recognition.**

Peer recognition not only reduces the likelihood of good behavior going unnoticed, but it also demonstrates trust and shows your commitment to building a culture where all employees feel like they belong.

While there's a time and place for formal approval-based recognition programs, peer recognition tends to be more social and helps employees build connections across the organization. The most successful programs include a healthy balance of recognition from peers and leaders.

Managers who are in the same location as employees still only have 30% visibility into the work being done.

—HR.COM

Share when and how to issue recognition

Too often, HR and employee engagement specialists assume employees understand why recognition is valuable, what behaviors deserve recognition and how to send impactful recognition. But it isn't always second nature for employees. Be intentional about making education a key part of your communication strategy.

Level up recognition to make a smarter ripple effect

While sending any form of recognition is better than none, the best recognitions are:

- > Timely
- > Detailed enough to feel personal
- > Tied to a core value

The more you create awareness of the impact one individual can make by issuing meaningful recognition, the greater program success you'll see and measure.



Happy 5th Workaversary!

Thanks for all you do day in and day out! You are an invaluable part of our team.

Accountability

Your expertise on our new product was really helpful today. You rock!



EMPLOYEES WHO RECEIVE FULFILLING, INDIVIDUALIZED & AUTHENTIC RECOGNITION AT WORK ARE

5x

as likely to feel connected to their work culture, and ...

4x

as likely to be engaged

—GALLUP

Set expectations with managers

Leaders set the tone for employee engagement, so it's important to tell managers your expectations for adopting and using the program. Managers should dedicate time each week (or at the very least, each month) to recognize team members in a meaningful way. You may want to go so far as to set specific goals for managers and track their monthly or quarterly progress on the program site, as well as trigger automated communications to celebrate meeting their goals.

Recognition matters even more for new hires

For example, make sure managers recognize new hires within their first 30 days of employment. Why? Because it has a direct impact on retention and thus your bottom line—like the client example below. The more clearly you communicate expectations, the more likely you are to have a recognition program that's consistently used and embraced by employees who feel like recognition is fair and equitable.

Client success story

Strategic employee recognition program unites team members at a global pet retailer

91%

of associates recognized
(that's 40,950 people!)

15%

retention increase at 3 months
for new associates who are
recognized at least once

\$11M+

saved by improving
retention of
new associates

Capture feedback

Once the program launches, notice how employees and leaders adopt the program.

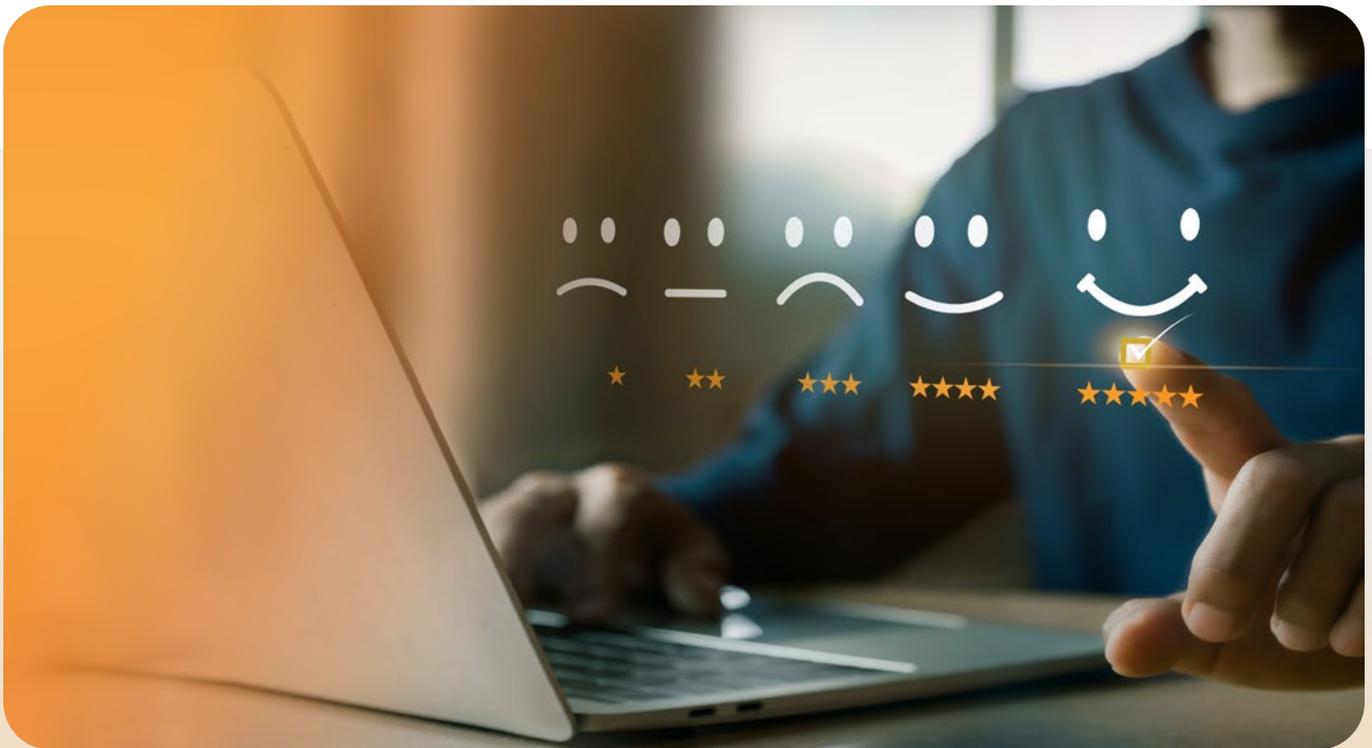
Deploy pulse surveys to track progress on goals and compare to the baseline results.

Optimize, optimize, optimize

After success measures are in place, don't set goals and assume you'll achieve them as planned. Be prepared to optimize or shift strategies based on the collected data. Having the right strategic partner on your side makes shifting strategies easier (and more effective).

Track progress often

Identify trends from the data and think about the next 12–18 months once the program has been live for a year. Compare your pre-launch vision to present and future goals.



Now apply steps 1–5

Celebrate what's working, spotlight engagement gaps and work toward a truly connected culture

The employee recognition road map is your self-paced guide on how to evolve your program, when to involve key audiences in decision making and feedback, and what actions to take during each of the 5 steps.

[Download the road map →](#)

Build a connected culture

Think of employee engagement as a connected experience. Our broader ebook, *Ultimate guide to aligning employee experience programs*, includes the information you just read on employee recognition, as well as step-by-step program road maps for leadership development, organizational culture and branding, and learning and development.

Whether your organization is interested in broad strategy shifts or small-scale program adjustments, our employee engagement team is also a resource. We'll assess your current environment and discuss areas for potential improvement.

[Download the ultimate guide →](#)



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Let's talk—itagroup.com

