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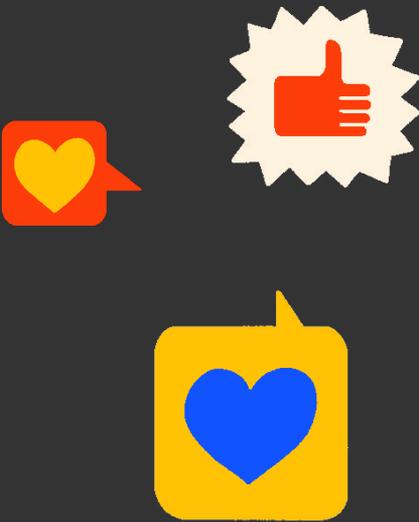
Employee recognition revisited

How modern employees want to be appreciated, and how managers can make their teams feel valued

Modern managers have many tasks, but one that sometimes gets sidelined is giving meaningful, effective employee recognition and frequent positive feedback. Your team works hard to bring their skills, smarts, and solutions to the table—and they want to know that their efforts have not gone unnoticed.

That's why we've created this complete guide to employee recognition, to help you make a habit of it in your day-to-day, and contribute to a culture of recognition on your team and in your organization. Plus, we offer plenty of tips and ideas to improve your recognition strategy.

What's in the guide:

Why is recognition important at work?

Receiving recognition instills a sense of pride and purpose in people, and helps fulfill <u>our most basic human need to feel valued</u>. Modern employees bring their whole selves to work and apply themselves not only with their technical skills, but also their passion and creativity. Simply put, work matters to people, and they want to feel that they matter to their team and their company, too.

We often think of recognition as coming after a big win, but the truth is that all of the work getting done in your organization brings value and is worthy of appreciation. Our Officevibe <u>Pulse Survey</u> data shows a strong correlation between whether employees say their organization celebrates accomplishments and learnings and feeling that their organization trusts them to contribute to its mission.

To reap the benefits of a real culture of recognition, you need to move beyond just applauding wins. Embracing the learnings that come from mistakes also needs to become the norm. A company culture that commends hard work regardless of outcomes drives a sense of psychological safety and personal investment from every staff member. This empowers people to be more innovative and think outside the box—a competitive advantage for any team.

Creating this kind of environment on your team starts with building personal habits as a manager to make recognition and learning a part of everyone's day-to-day. Be intentional about acknowledging your employees' hard work until it becomes a reflex, and share your own failures and learnings with your team. The more that you lead by example, the more that your team members will follow suit.

The business impact of employee recognition

In the purpose-driven modern workforce, having our contributions acknowledged is as important as ever. Receiving regular recognition at work impacts every-thing from people's commitment to and investment in their role, their relationship with their manager and with their peers, and even their perception of organizational structures and values. How do we know?

When we look at our Employee Pulse Survey data, the strongest correlation between any 2 of our 26 Engagement Sub-Metrics is between Recognition Frequency and Happiness at Work. People want to feel appreciated for their efforts, and the frequency at which they receive this recognition is directly tied to their levels of happiness. But that's not the only thing that regular recognition impacts for employees.

We also see a strong correlation between employees' satisfaction with recognition frequency and:

- Feeling that their work is fulfilling.
- Having a sense of accomplishment in their day-to-day.
- Feeling that the feedback they receive helps them grow and develop.
- How they rate their peers' contribution to achieving goals and objectives.
- Their general feelings about working with their direct manager.
- Feeling that their organization trusts them to contribute to its mission.
- How they feel their organization makes use of their strengths.

34% of employees are unhappy with how frequently they're recognized.

———— Officevibe Pulse Survey Data

Yet, 34% of employees report that they are unhappy with how frequently they're recognized at work. Giving more recognition—and making it meaningful—is one of the most low-cost, high-impact things that managers can do to increase employee engagement. In the next section, we talk about how.

How does your team feel about recognition?

Track employee engagement with metrics like Recognition, Personal Growth, and Satisfaction on your team using Officevibe Pulse Surveys. To learn more visit officevibe.com

How to make employee recognition meaningful

Prioritizing positive reinforcement goes for both your 1-on-1s with employees and addressing your team as a group. You want people to feel that their individual contributions are valued, and to see how this is amplified when they work together. These 5 steps will help you take your employee recognition practices to the next level.

1. Learn employees' preferences

People have different preferences when it comes to recognition. Some might enjoy receiving public praise while others find a private exchange more personal. One employee might feel validated when they get lots of recognition while another may prefer that you save it for big moments. Getting to know your employees and how they like to receive recognition is the first step in making it meaningful.

(TIP)

The best way to find out is simply to ask

During your 1-on-1s with employees, make a point of asking them about their recognition preferences. Ask questions like:

- What's the best way for me to show you that I appreciate your work?
- How do you like to celebrate when you achieve a goal?
- Who do you like to receive recognition from the most?

2. Be sincere and specific

Rather than doling out compliments for the sake of it, take the time to figure out what you appreciate before you speak. Were you impressed by your employee's skills? Their quick thinking? Their courage? Their adaptability? Whatever the case, pinpoint it and name it clearly. Authenticity and specificity make recognition more powerful.

TIP

Consider what's important to employees

When recognizing employees, it's equally important to consider what you know about your employee, their goals, and their values. Be specific about what impressed you, but connect it with what you know is important to them. Here's an example:

> *Great job presenting your new strategic direction to Sophia and Charlie the other day. You really did your research preparing it and it showed in your answers to their questions. I know sharing your work in this way makes you nervous, and you were totally relaxed and confident in the meeting.*

3. Make it timely

It's never too soon to give recognition to your employees or your team, and there is always room to give informal recognition in your day-to-day. Celebrate when goals are met or big projects are completed, but don't forget to acknowledge everyone's great work as they're working towards these milestones as well. Letting people know that you see their efforts in real-time shows that you're paying attention, and that you're not just focused on results.

Make time when you're in the thick of it

TIP

It's easy for everyone to stick to their tasks when your team is working towards a big deadline or crunching to hit a target. But these are the moments where bringing everyone together and sharing your appreciation can be the most motivating. Find 5 minutes to let your team know that their hard work and dedication are taking you in the right direction.

4. Highlight the impact

Employees want to feel connected with their organization's purpose, and the best way to do this is by highlighting the impact their work has. Whether it's reflected through business metrics, a delighted client, or supported teammates, showing how someone's efforts contribute to greater objectives makes them feel like an asset. When you're delivering recognition, always be sure to state why what they've done was important.

Support yourself with back-up

Whether it's numbers based on team goals, a client testimonial, or the kind words of a colleague, having something to support your recognition can give it extra significance. Take a moment to find something tangible to better show people the outcomes of their efforts.

5. Centre your team around shared values

When team members are all connected by shared core values, it offers a kind of North Star for everything from communication norms to collaboration practices and prioritizing initiatives. This not only contributes to healthy team dynamics and performance, it also serves as a reference point for recognition. If everyone is aligned on what's important to the team, they can easily point to these values when recognizing the good work and behaviour of other team members.

Create a set of team principles

This is something <u>we tried on our own team</u>, and it completely shifted our working dynamics (in a good way!), not to mention our performance. Some tips to help you out in this exercise:

- Create the principles as a team. When everyone is a part of creating the principles, they feel more personally accountable to them.

- Practice using these principles in recognition. For example, if honesty is a principle, you might say, "I admired how transparent you were about your thoughts at our town hall today."

- Come up with catchy one-liners for each principle to make them easier to reference in your day-to-day. For example, we now often bring up our principle of "calling out the elephant in the room" both as we do it and when we offer recognition to one another for having done it.

Remote recognition: maintaining morale

Today, many of us are <u>working remotely</u>, or at least have some team members who are. Adjusting to a lack of face-to-face interaction and nonverbal communication poses some challenges for managers and teams, but it's no reason to deprioritize recognition. Try these tips to keep up your culture of employee appreciation as a remote team.

Remote recognition ideas

- Give formal recognition in every 1-on-1. Think ahead about something your employee did well and the impact it had on the team, then share with them in the meeting.

- Try kicking off a team Zoom call by sharing some honest recognition with each of your employees in a group setting.

- Every Friday, send a kudos to one of your team members in a shared Slack channel. Tell them to pass it on, creating a train of kudos for the team.

- When presenting your team's work in cross-team or company-wide virtual updates, make a point of naming people and their contribution.

Don't forget: tell your team how well they're collaborating from afar. When they finish a project or when they're in the midst of it, it's never a bad moment to let them know you see their agility and resilience.

Keep a pulse on your remote team
Officevibe helps you stay connected with your remote team with Engagement Surveys, Anonymous Feedback, and a Complete 1-on-1 Tool. To learn more visit officevibe.com

Where recognition and feedback meet

While it might seem that recognition and positive feedback are one and the same, the connection goes a little deeper than that. When we think about the real purpose of feedback—both positive and negative—the truth is that all feedback can be seen as a form of recognition. We'll break it down a bit further.

Feedback should help people grow, develop, and learn. It challenges people to see things from another perspective and reevaluate their approach. In a world of work where employees want this challenge, and want a manager who coaches them along the way, offering feedback is one of the ways you can show your team members that you value them. If you didn't care, you wouldn't coach.

It ultimately boils down to the intention behind the feedback. For feedback to be a type of recognition, it must come from an authentic place of valuing your employees and wanting them to succeed. Here's how you can make employee feedback a form of meaningful recognition.

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Make feedback a form of recognition

1. Check your intent: ask yourself, is the feedback you're about to share coming from the perspective of a coach, or a boss?

2. Set the tone: tell your employee from the outset why you're sharing the feedback (hint: it should be about your personal investment in their professional development).

3. Connect it to their goals: explain how the feedback connects directly with their <u>development goals</u>, so they see it as a form of support.

4. End with thank you: thank them for hearing you out and being open to your feedback, and encourage them to share feedback with you, too.

Remember: Just as not all feedback comes with a compliment, not all recognition needs next steps. Sometimes "you did an amazing job, thank you" stands strongest alone.

Promoting peer-to-peer recognition

Your team wants your appreciation, but receiving recognition from peers is just as important. Teammates collaborate and strive towards common goals, and oftentimes they have more visibility on each other's day-to-day than their manager does. This is why peer-to-peer or social recognition is so meaningful; it's coming from an equal who might have a deeper understanding of what goes into the work. We looked to our Officevibe Survey and Feedback data to uncover some tangible takeaways for managers to promote peer recognition on their teams.
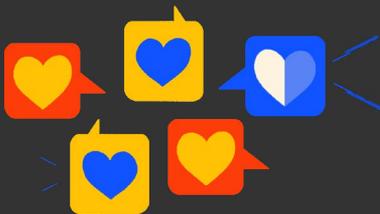
88% of employees say their organization encourages peer-to-peer recognition.

Officevibe Pulse Survey Data

When asked if their organization encourages employees to give recognition to peers, **88% of employees said yes**. This is great news, but we wanted to learn more. So we analyzed over 50K anonymized employee feedback messages about what organizations do well or could do better to promote peer-to-peer recognition. Now, we're passing these employee insights on to you with 3 simple rituals you can establish on your team to help boost recognition among peers.

1. Make a recurring meeting a recognition opportunity

Whether it's a daily, weekly, or monthly meeting, employees recommend that managers make time for peer recognition during these recurring team moments. Reserve some time to close out one of your regular meetings by having each employee offer kudos to one or more of their peers. We suggest picking a meeting where you're discussing work that's been done, like a review or a retro, so that context is fresh in everyone's minds.

2. Create a dedicated space for peer recognition

Employees want a dedicated space for peer recognition, and they want their manager to encourage people to leave messages and lead by example by leaving their own. While you might not have an IRL whiteboard to write on, you can create a virtual one or start a new Slack/Teams/Yammer channel for peer recognition. We suggest including things like company values, team principles and goals, and current projects to orient everyone around what binds the team.

3. Start a monthly recognition award

Having a certain token, like recognition awards or kudos cards, was often cited by employees as supporting more peer recognition. On our own team, we've implemented an award to serve this purpose. Each month during a team meeting, one teammate passes the trophy (it can be metaphorical if you're a remote team) on to one of their peers. When the trophy is passed, the giver speaks about why they selected their colleague and

how their colleague supports the team. Document each passing of the trophy with notes on what the giver said in a space where all teammates can refer back to it.

Feeling valued and appreciated at work is directly tied to employee happiness and engagement. While giving and encouraging recognition is an important part of management, it can easily fall to the side of the many other tasks of your role. Be intentional about making employee and team recognition a priority, so that everyone brings their all, and knows their efforts are seen.

The best teams run on trust

Build trust, strengthen relationships, succeed as a team. Officevibe is the simple engagement platform for busy managers who care as much about their people as performance.

To learn more visit officevibe.com.