Create a culture of recognition in the workplace

A guide to keeping your company successful
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 creating a culture of recognition in the workplace, to help you make a habit of it in your day-to-day with your team, and within your organization. Plus, we offer plenty of tips and ideas to improve your recognition strategy.
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Why is recognition important at work?

Receiving recognition instills a sense of pride and purpose in people, and helps fulfill our most basic human need to feel valued. 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.

Since transitioning to a remote work approach, companies have been losing the human connection we were once all so accustomed to. This means that now more than ever, it’s important to regularly recognize and communicate that all work that’s done within your organization brings value and is worthy of appreciation (not just after a big win!).

57% of employees feel impacted by working remotely, feeling that their work achievements are less noticed by higher-ups since shifting to remote work.

From Officevibe data
The need for recognition, in numbers.

It’s no secret that there’s a strong correlation between employee recognition and healthy workplace cultures. In fact, the truth is in the numbers. Our Officevibe Pulse Survey 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. Here’s what else our data shows:

66% of employees are satisfied with the frequency at which they receive recognition.

72% of employees get praise less than once a week.

25% of employees says their organization doesn’t celebrate accomplishments or learnings.
If recognition is only given a few times a year at most, it can make employees feel as though they are not appreciated and need to work harder to be recognized. In order to have a positive impact, recognition should be given at least a few times per month. The benefits of recognition affect both the employee, and the organization itself.

This is especially true when the feedback is truly personalized. Go above and beyond things like reward programs and praise walls and recognize employees in an authentic, human way.
Start building the habit of recognition

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 everything 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 and motivation.
However, according to Gallup, 81% of senior leaders say recognition is not a major strategic priority for their organization. By not making recognition a priority, many organizations are missing out on achieving the benefits of the impact that regular recognition has on employees:

- **56%** less likely to be seeking new job opportunities
- **3x** as likely to feel loyal to their organization
- **4x** as likely to be engaged
- **5x** as likely to see a path to grow within their organization
- **4x** as likely to recommend their organization as a great place to work
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.
How does your team feel about recognition?

Our data shows that 34% of employees 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.

Track employee engagement with metrics like Recognition, Personal Growth, and Satisfaction on your team using Officevibe Pulse Surveys.

To learn more visit officevibe.com
5 steps to create a culture of recognition

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.

Tip

Make time when you’re in the thick of it.

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 when 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.

Tip

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.

Tip

Create a set of team principles.

This is something we tried on our own team, 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.
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
Peer-to-peer recognition rituals from employees

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 simple rituals you can establish on your team to help boost recognition among peers.

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.
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.
Get to know Good Vibes

Now that you know that recognition can help organizations reinforce their values and understand how they translate into people’s behaviors at work, it’s time to think about how to create a culture of recognition within your organization. This starts with the right approach, and even the right tools.

At Officevibe, we created Good Vibes as a way to highlight positive efforts and give your employees a simple, human way to recognize each other. Considering that employees are receptive to receiving recognition in different ways, that peer-to-peer recognition should feel authentic and come from the heart, and that participation should be voluntary in order to feel genuine, it’s important to offer recognition in a way that suits everyone.
Here’s how Good Vibes does just that:

Visibility where it counts
Not everyone wants a public shoutout. Good Vibes prioritizes visibility between colleagues and managers instead of noisy praise walls or competitive rewards programs that don't celebrate human values and feel unauthentic.

Fun and easy
Good Vibes gives that little spark needed to connect us to our social instincts and spread joy with clever cues and engaging messages. Simply pick a card, tag a peer, and let them know how great they are.

Goes with the flow
Get Good Vibes notifications in Slack or Microsoft Teams. Give props after your Pulse Survey prompt. We work where you work to keep things simple.

As we touched on previously, one of the biggest downfalls of remote work is that workers feel that their accomplishments are far less visible than they were when working at the office. Having a tool like Good Vibes can help maintain the quality of the relationships we were accustomed to having in person.
When good deeds and kind words are seen by peers and managers, it can even help managers identify how team members feel about each other and celebrate their shared wins to encourage teamwork and engagement. It’s also a great way to uncover achievements that may have otherwise gone unnoticed and build a better picture of employee performance.

92% of team members are more likely to repeat actions they are recognized for.

From Officevibe data

Send a Good Vibe today
A new approach to employee experience

Officevibe is the incredibly friendly people-first employee experience platform — your fresh, new way to engage, recognize, align, and enable world-class leaders and teams.

Get started free