



WHITEPAPER

Frontline Worker Recognition Guide



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Introduction

"71 percent of respondents in executive roles call employee engagement very important to achieving organizational business goals. Behavior that gets recognized gets repeated, which is why actions that improve organizational alignment, innovation, service, and growth should be recognized every day" ([HBR](#)).

What we all really want is to be recognized. Appreciated. Valued. In fact, one of the main reasons employees quit is a lack of recognition ([Inc.](#)).

And we know that creating and fostering a culture of recognition is key to engaging employees and creating a better overall employee experience. But, why do we struggle so much with getting something as simple as employee recognition right?

DID YOU KNOW?



Only **1 in 3 workers** believe they received some form of recognition or praise in the last week.

2X

Employees who don't feel recognized are **twice as likely** to quit within the next year.

Source: Gallup

And all this under-appreciation is starting to take a toll...especially on frontline workers who can feel like they work in unsafe conditions—some feeling expendable—who work without thanks, who work despite a pandemic, being called heroes just to be told to “get back to work already” as the world braces for the Great Resignation. The Great *Discontent*.

It's no surprise that frontline workers are facing burnout like never before.

Why Employee Recognition is SO Important

Employee recognition is one of the most important things you can do to retain your employees. We're not saying adequate compensation, benefits, and working conditions aren't also critical for retention, because they are, but recognition is one of the most affordable and easiest ways to improve retention and even performance.

- When managers give weekly feedback, their team is 3.2x more likely to strongly agree they are motivated to do outstanding work (Gallup).
- "A toxic corporate culture is by far the strongest predictor of industry-adjusted attrition and is ten times more important than compensation in predicting turnover" (Toxic Culture is Driving the Great Resignation).

But here's the problem:

- 60% of employees are neutral or disagree that their organization is effective at helping employees feel seen and appreciated at work (Blueboard, The State of Workplace Connection Report, 2022).
- 38% of employers think attrition is due to compensation. But 54% of employees leave because they don't feel valued and 51% leave because they don't feel a sense of belonging (McKinsey & Company).



So, even though recognition can make a huge difference, we aren't very good at it.

And we're even worse at ensuring our frontline and non-deskbound employees are consistently getting recognition.

Challenges of Recognizing Frontline Workers

While all employees are deserving of consistent and meaningful recognition, we are going to focus on frontline or deskless workers who we often have trouble even communicating with in the first place. So, why is it so difficult to recognize frontline employees?

38% of employers think attrition is due to compensation...

But the truth is:

54% quit because they don't feel valued by their manager

51% quit because they don't feel a sense of belonging

Source: McKinsey & Company

Historically, investments in technology and programs have focused on deskbound office workers. As the workforce starts to shift to accommodate remote and hybrid work, we hope this starts to change and that more mobile-first initiatives take priority. But our concern is that our efforts will still prioritize *deskbound* employees. Here's why:

- **Frontline workers have access to fewer channels** of communication. They often rely on the "Cascade of Communication" where they get all their information from their direct manager.
- **Line managers struggle with communication** and often fail to communicate appreciation or performance: 69% of managers are uncomfortable communicating with their direct reports and 37% are uncomfortable giving direct feedback about their performance ([HBR](#)).
- **We don't make it a priority.** Deskless workers make up the majority of the workforce. Being on the front lines often means there isn't much spare time for regular recognition.

As an internal communications, HR, or Operations professional, you have a lot of power to start shifting the imbalance at your organization. As you rethink your recognition and engagement programs, make sure that you include your frontline teams.

Recognition Best Practices & Strategies

DID YOU KNOW?

9 in 10 people would work for LESS money in exchange for more meaningful work ([HBR](#)).

The [ROI of investing in employee appreciation programs](#) is obvious:

- Lowers turnover rates
- Improves workplace culture at all levels
- Increases productivity

But how do we get started? And how do we create a system for employee appreciation that really makes a difference?

1. Follow a Regular Cadence

Experts at Gartner say “employee recognition that’s delivered on an infrequent, exclusive and set schedule (e.g. annual) will have limited sustained impact”. Instead, it has to be literally built into our day-to-day, and our managers need to carry the torch. Any time a manager is preparing to meet with their team or an individual, they need to keep the contributions of their team members in mind and ingrain that into their talk track.

Gallup consultants believe that **weekly recognition** is best because it allows for a manager to thank and celebrate accomplishments in a timely manner.

Best Practices

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2. Ingrain Recognition Into Existing Systems

It's not enough to just try to remember who did what and deserves praise for it. Recognition for everyone to be done on a large scale requires thought and a strategic approach. Experts at Gartner recommend the following:

- **Shift from annual or biannual performance reviews to continuous performance management.** Not only will this help managers address any performance issues in real-time, it also provides more opportunities for discussing successes and strengths.
- **Invest in a talent management system that allows managers to document individual employee wins.** Managers are incredibly busy and can lead large teams, which makes it difficult to remember the details when it comes time to give a performance review. Having a system where leaders can all document notes and praise in one place makes it easier to recall these highlights over time.
- **Integrate performance into your learning management system.** An important type of recognition that sometimes gets overlooked is investing in your people. Giving them a chance to learn a new skill or move up in your organization. Make sure your LMS isn't just used for onboarding and training on new procedures. Use it as a tool to track employee progress, give them chances to grow and improve, and recognize them for these efforts.

3. Make Recognition Targeted and Personalized

If everyone gets the same praise time after time, it starts to feel like a one-size-fits all sweater that really doesn't fit anyone.

For recognition to make someone really feel recognized you want to be as specific as possible. Rather than just saying, "You've been really working hard this month," instead, you pull in specific details, "I've noticed how hard you've been working on this project, collaborating with team members, being incredibly timely with your deadlines, and really leading your peers."

4. Don't Just Check The Box

One problem that we see with recognition is that it can seem forced or patronizing. We might fall back into the habit of recognizing an individual for something they already do well and have been doing well, rather than taking note of the new ways they're challenging themselves or calling out something that you really think deserves to be acknowledged.

Best Practices

CONTINUED

5. Mix Up Your Recognition Methods

Just like how you don't want to recognize multiple people for the exact same thing over and over, the same thing goes for how you recognize your team. There are many forms of recognition for your arsenal:

- One-on-one praise
- Public praise
- Formal (in an evaluation) and informal (a quick note at the end of the day)
- Monetary
- Awards or commendations
- Promotions

It can even help to mix up who the recognition comes from. [Gallup](#) surveyed employees to learn **who the most meaningful and memorable recognition they received came from** and they found:

- 28% said it came from their direct manager
- 24% said it came from the CEO
- 12% said it came from their manager's manager
- 10% said it came from a customer
- 9% said it came from a peer
- 17% said it came from another source

But we know that most frontline employees will never hear from the CEO or member of the executive team. Many might not even get to hear customer feedback. It's up to us to make this information more accessible to employees and to help our executive leaders be better at connecting with frontline teams so they can recognize them.

6. Keep Culture and Values in Mind

At the end of the day, recognition does more than retain and fire up our teams. It's a way to forge and strengthen company culture.

Recognition reinforces desired behaviors. So, it's a good best practice to reward people based on living your mission and values. For contributing to a positive culture on their team. Some of the best recognition campaigns we've seen focus on one of the company values and finds an employee who really embodies that value.

Frontline Worker Recognition Ideas

With these best practices in mind, we'll share some recognition campaign ideas you can start implementing right away. We highly recommend considering an internal comms channel that all employees have access to, which will allow employees to engage and exponentially increase the power behind every recognition post.



New Hires, Anniversaries & Retirements

A fairly easy campaign to get started with is regularly celebrating new hires, work anniversaries, and retirees from your company.

You can keep this analog if you don't have a good comms channel for the frontline. Each announcement can be put in print and posted in the break room with the employee's photo or can be published on the shared kiosk or workstation computer. But this really leaves a lot to be desired.

If you invest in an employee app, for example, you can share short videos of the person you're recognizing or a series of pictures with highlights about them, their time at the company, etc. And then people can like and comment and share congratulations or a warm welcome.

We do this at our company. Our HR team asks all new hires a set of simple questions:

- What did you do before joining our company?
- What are some of your interests?
- What do you look forward to about joining our team?

And then the employee can write their answers or record a quick video. Simultaneously, when a new employee starts, they get a welcome postcard signed from the CEO. Even though these aren't always unique, the combination of a post where all their new coworkers can welcome them and the personal touch of getting the postcard is a great way to set the right tone for a new hire.

Peer & Manager Recognition

Peer and manager recognition can be really powerful when done well. We think the key is to mix in peer recognition with recognition from the manager and from senior leadership.

Here are a few ways to get a peer recognition program going:

- **Anonymous compliments.** If you want to keep it small and at the facility or team-level, one way to do peer recognition is to select a cadence (we recommend quarterly or biannually) and use a team meeting to share the love. Have employees write down at least one compliment for a peer down anonymously and collect them throughout a week. You can then read them out or give them to the employee. We recommend having managers and shift leaders write down one for everyone on the staff to make sure everyone gets some recognition.
- **Include peer comments in performance reviews.** A good manager is always keeping an eye on the dynamics of their team, both good and bad. And ideally they are able to make note of the positive sentiments shared about members of their team—this is where it's helpful to have a database! Include some of these remarks in employee performance reviews so they get a 360 degree view of how they're doing.
- **Award nominations.** If you want to go BIG, then each quarter, ask employees to nominate a peer that really lives the values. Then at the facility or team level, pick one of the employees from the nomination pile—ideally, someone who has been nominated by several people. Then the executive team can announce what employees have really shone that quarter. When we did this at our company, we also gave out a modest cash prize as well to really make the selected employees feel special.

Leadership Videos

Another way to really show employees that you care about them and that their contributions are being noticed is to activate leaders at the top of your organization. Having a senior leader shout out employees for living the values or for a tremendous achievement can be another way to diversify your recognition program.

An easy way to do this is to have leaders record [selfie-style videos](#) acknowledging an employee by name and then sharing it on your various internal communication channels. Here are some specific examples:

- Pick a goal or target for the quarter that is measurable. Then have your COO or CEO announce a contest for the quarter in a video. And track the results, giving updates on leading teams or individual contributors along the way. At the end of the contest time frame, have that same senior leader do a video announcing the winners and talking about what they accomplished. This is more meaningful than a generic thank you and can also contribute to organizational goals.
- Have managers nominate an employee every month that deserves recognition, and have them include why that employee should be featured. Senior leadership can then pick from those nominees someone to call out individually in a video. You can and should do this for your frontline managers as well who work really hard and don't always get enough support.



Goal or Value-Oriented Contests

Not all your contests have to be led or sponsored by an executive leader though. Managers of individual teams or specific regions/divisions can lead their own events year round to keep employees motivated and feeling appreciated for hard work. And when smaller groups run contests/awards, you're able to recognize more people and focus on different goals or desired activities.

When done right these contests can also make goal achievement more fun and create a more collaborative work environment overall. But if you are going to run a contest or award-program for your employees, make sure it is oriented around either a **goal** or a company **value**.

Goal-Oriented Contests: Pick goals that relate to your employees' daily jobs. And remember these should be [SMART goals](#) and achievable. Try to vary these over time so you aren't only recognizing the same high-performers each time. Here are a few ideas:

- Most sales over a time frame.
- Most positive CSAT scores/reviews over a time frame.
- Most employee advocacy posts on social media over a time frame (this is great if you are actively recruiting and want your employees to spread the word, or if you have a new product launch or company announcement).

Value-Oriented Contests: Living your corporate values and making them a part of everything you do is one of the best ways to reinforce desired behaviors and build the culture you want. And, ideally, your values and culture describe what your workforce and company is really like not just what you aspire to be. So, there should be many opportunities to recognize employees for living your values and striving towards your purpose/mission. Here are a few ways to do that:

- Much like peer recognition, you can nominate employees and managers for living the values. This can be formally done once a quarter with a monetary reward or it can be more ad hoc and shared in your newsletter. There are many ways to do this, just make sure that whatever method you choose actually makes your employees feel good and truly recognized.
- Managers can assign value points each month. Beyond an employee being great at their actual job, this is a way to call out employees for being a great team player or taking accountability, for example, if your values were Teamwork and Taking Ownership. Managers can choose to share each instance of living a value during shift meetings or they can make it a larger contest and award a winner at the end of each month.
- Photo contests where employees can submit (or post) photos of what they think exemplifies the organization. This is a great way to get creative and give your employees a fun activity and challenge outside of work. But this is great for your company because then you can use those employee photos for other communications.

Tools for Recognizing to Non-Wired Workers

There are many ways that you can build your employee recognition program for frontline workers for any budget.

Gifting Tools (like Postal.io)

If you are looking to provide appreciation in the form of gifts for your employees, there are some really great direct mailing solutions out there now. At theEMPLOYEEapp, we use a company called [Postal.io](#) and every department uses it. So, this goes beyond just employee recognition gifts, and can also be used for giving gifts to clients or partners, marketing efforts, etc.

You can totally buy gifts ad hoc, but what we like about a platform like Postal is that you can send a physical or digital gift to someone and they confirm their shipping/email information once they receive the gift email. So, it removes a ton of the hassle of gathering that information.

But it's also great because they warehouse all their gifts (including your custom swag kits), so you don't have to.

Mobile Communication Tools (like theEMPLOYEEapp)

Last but not least, we should talk about communication tools. The biggest obstacle for frontline worker recognition is the lack of access to them. If you don't currently have a channel that can directly reach your frontline workers and target communications to your frontline managers, [it is time to consider one](#)! Having a channel, like an employee app, allows you to:

- **Share talking points, recognition ideas, and reminders with frontline managers**, so they get better at communicating with and recognizing their teams. So much of engagement and retention comes down to managers, so as much as you can do to support them will go a long way.
- **Enable better engagement.** App features like Hashtags, @Mentions, and Thread Commenting enable employees to engage with each other more productively. Hashtags allow admins to create recognition campaigns, @Mentions enable users to get a push notification when a recognition post mentioning them is shared, and thread commenting lets end users easily celebrate their peers.
- **Directly reach frontline employees.** This means that all employees, even those without intranet and email access, get to see other employees being recognized and receive direct recognition as well. Not all managers are as good at recognition as others, so this helps you start to level the playing field.

About theEMPLOYEEapp

theEMPLOYEEapp was created by communications and HR professionals to address the challenges organizations face communicating with a dispersed and deskless workforce. theEMPLOYEEapp is an internal communication and engagement solution that allows workers to have fast and easy access to the information, documents, and resources they need to succeed in their work.

Our app allows you to target information to your employees when and where they need it on their smartphone, tablet, or computer, and empower leaders and frontline managers to engage and activate employees across the organization. Unlike most traditional communications channels, theEMPLOYEEapp creates a customized, branded experience for employees, encouraging your workforce to join together in a single, centralized channel.

Our Mission is to enable the effortless flow of meaningful information for organizations driven by frontline workers.

[Request a Demo](#)

