

Achievers

The Ultimate Guide to **EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION:** BUILDING CULTURE, PERFORMANCE AND RESILIENCE



“Effective recognition not only motivates the recipient but can serve as a strong signal to other employees of behaviours they should emulate.

Recognition can take many forms other than monetary rewards — public acknowledgment, tokens of appreciation, development opportunities, and low-cost perks.”

- Gartner 2020³

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Introduction

The power of inclusive and frequent employee recognition

Now, more than ever, our commercial and economic landscape could be described as VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. So here's what we do know:

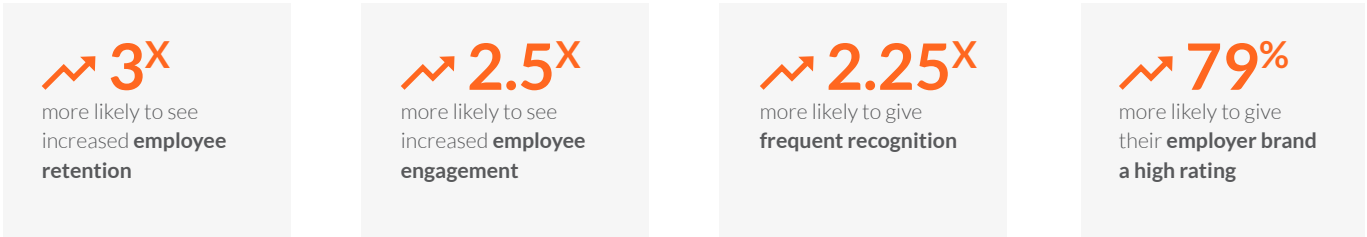
Employee engagement *builds resilience*.
Employee recognition *builds engagement*.

And yet...

A quarter of UK employees feel that they are never recognised for work.

Only 1 in 5 recognition-starved UK employees consider themselves valued¹.

Building a culture of recognition and appreciation is critical to drive the trust and engagement needed to survive and succeed. Brandon Hall Group's 2020 Culture of Recognition survey² shows that organisations where employees highly rate their culture of recognition are:



It's not safe to assume that your entire workforce is being suitably recognised, because the chances are high that this isn't happening consistently or frequently enough across your business to be creating the impact you need.

It's time to re-think recognition and see it as the powerful catalyst that will help you to engage and align your employees—wherever they are working—to drive improved business culture, performance and resilience.



PART 1:

The value of employee recognition

Why you should have an impactful
employee recognition strategy

The commercial benefits of recognition

“Employee recognition programs increase engagement and productivity.”
- Gallup 2016⁴

Employee engagement has come a long way since the MacLeod report was published over a decade ago.⁵

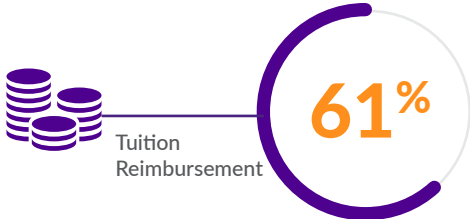
A quick internet search will bring up hundreds of reports, statistics and papers that have been produced since then, evidencing the business case for employee engagement. At its simplest, companies in the top 25% for employee engagement are, on average, 22% more profitable and experience 41% less absenteeism than organisations in the bottom 25%.⁶

It’s natural, then for businesses of all sizes to want to increase employee engagement. And the best way you can do this is through effective recognition.

Recognition fulfils our intrinsic need to achieve, and motivates us because of our inherent desire for acceptance and belonging. Recognition provides the avenue for purpose to be infused into daily actions. And it provides perspective by demonstrating how our work connects with all levels of the bigger picture—how it impacts the people around us, our team, our company and the purpose of the organisation.

Recognition impacts on organisational success in three main areas: **culture**, **performance** and **resilience**.

Recognition is the single most effective driver for employee engagement



Source: Aptitude Research Partners, Impact Study 2018, n=512

Culture

“Organisations with higher-performing cultures create a 3x return to shareholders.”
- Six elements to create a high-performing culture, McKinsey 2018 ⁷

In their People and Skills report *Great Job: solving the productivity puzzle through the power of people* (2019), the CBI identifies that recognising people’s contribution to a shared purpose as one of the seven key habits that can make a difference to how businesses lead, engage and develop their people.

At its highest level, a shared purpose is delivering our company vision: achieving corporate goals, delivering on brand promises, and aligning the way we work and behave with our company values. A company that has a great culture will see its values played out in the behaviours of its employees, bringing them to life through everyday action.

Recognising values-based behaviours whenever they are demonstrated helps to reinforce and embed them, not only for that person, but also for the colleagues who will see that recognition and the positive role modelling it relates to.

And if you’re any doubt, values aren’t just about being warm and fuzzy. There are tangible bottom line benefits when positive organisational values are seen in the behaviour of employees.



“Values are a business enabler in 70% of high-performing organisations.”
- World Economic Forum, 2017⁸

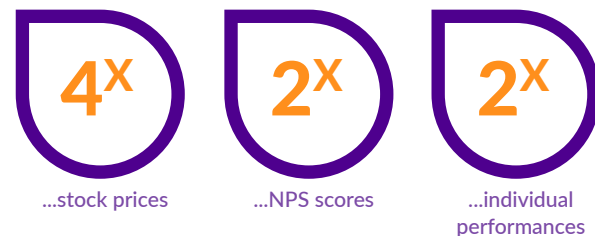
Performance

Recognition makes employees feel valued. But it also drives performance.

- **92%** of employees agree when they're recognised for a specific action, they're more likely to take that action again in the future
- **90%** say when they receive recognition it motivates them to work harder⁹

The Business Impact of Social Recognition

More likely to improve...



Source: Aptitude Research Partners, Impact Study 2018, n=512

Resilience

While organisations may not be able to take action on compensation right now, our survey results show that they can achieve a 55% improvement in engagement by addressing employees' need for work recognition through non-financial means.

- McKinsey 2020¹⁰

For an organisation to be resilient, its employees need to be too. Change is always a constant, but the rate and nature of change has recently reached a whole new level for most of us.

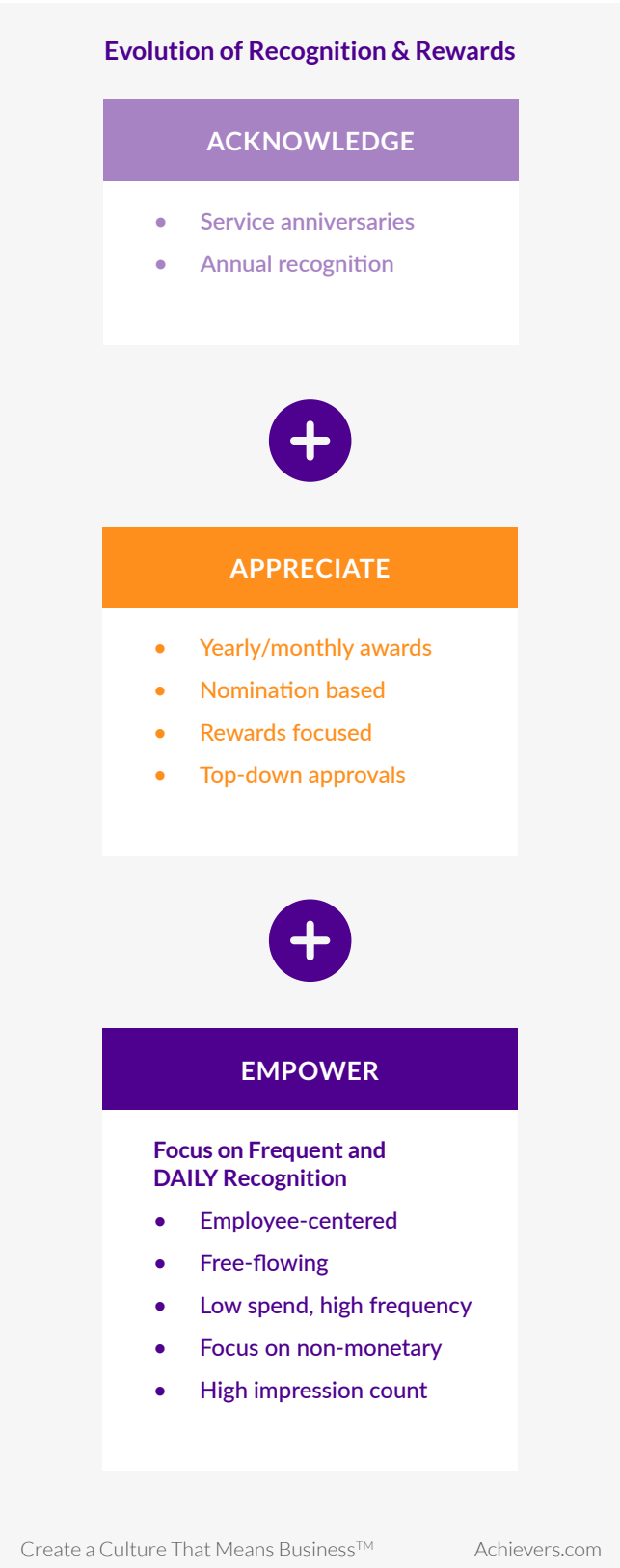
Whether it's changes to working practices, adopting new ways of collaborating, or even having to deal with the reality of fewer people in the team going forward, resilience plays an important part in supporting personal and organisational performance.

Companies that have an established positive culture—founded in employee engagement and driven by recognition—are likely to emerge better from a recession or substantial shift in the market than their counterparts.

Understanding how to keep your employees engaged, aligned, and recognised—especially remotely—will be paramount to future engagement and business success.

Ball State University has found that companies with engaged employees are more likely to be innovative and entrepreneurial.¹¹

How evolved is your organisation's recognition?



- If you're still stuck doing only **Acknowledgement**, you'll be giving recognition for predetermined achievements at fixed intervals. While these are evergreen recognition tactics that people value and an organisation should commit to, there are obvious downsides to this approach. It's not inclusive, it's infrequent, doesn't contribute to embedding values... you get the drift.
 - You could well be at the **Appreciate** level, which we've found is where most organisations are. You'll still be doing Acknowledgement, naturally, but you'll also be recognising good work and living organisational values. This is most likely still to be from a top-down perspective, although you may well have a peer-to-peer element included.
 - Intervals still tend to be fixed, although more frequent, and because this type of recognition is generally rewards-focused, it's likely to be subject to budgetary constraints. Again, only the top-performing employees (3-5%) are likely to be recognised, leaving up to 97% of your employees feeling unappreciated.
 - The aspiration should be to operate recognition at the **Empower** level. You'll still be carrying out those important Acknowledge and Appreciate activities, but the focus has shifted to frequent and daily recognition, enabling employees to appreciate, share and celebrate the successes that are happening all around them all the time.
- By layering all these approaches, you will be able to elevate your entire organisational culture and nurture deeper employee engagement.

“Compared with business units in the bottom quartile, those in the top quartile of engagement realise substantially better customer engagement, higher productivity, better retention, fewer accidents, and 21% higher profitability.”

- Gallup, 2018 ¹²

Feeling valued is essential to feeling committed to and engaged at work. And yet:

61% of workers feel sufficiently valued by their colleagues

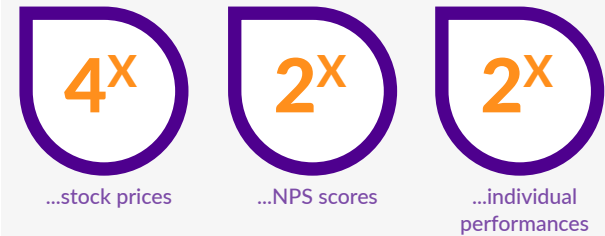
Only 49% feel valued by management ¹

Your corporate leaders will naturally be thinking about costs. They are more likely to consider advancing corporate recognition when they know there will be a measurable return on investment, in terms of employee engagement, which impacts hugely on all areas of the business.

Improved service **drives greater customer satisfaction, higher productivity** and **fewer safety incidents**. Increased staff retention means **less needs to be spent on hiring new talent**. And organisations with emotionally engaged employees are more likely to see **more innovation**—it all adds up to **greater profitability**.

The Commercial Impact of Social Recognition

More likely to improve...



Source: Aptitude Research Partners, Impact Study 2018, n=512

“67% of managers [think] they are above average in offering praise and recognition to their employees but only 23% of their workers [agree].”

- Adrian Gostick & Chester Elton
Leading with Gratitude



PART 2:

Turning recognition strategy into measurable impact

Planning, designing and activating
your recognition programme

The principles of employee recognition



Despite clear evidence from behavioural science concerning the amount and type of recognition that's most effective at building employee engagement, less than half of employers follow the fundamental best practice principles of effective recognition.

Performance-based

Employee recognition has the greatest impact when it clearly relates to something an individual has done. This doesn't have to be a major achievement—this is all about motivating people to excel in their day-to-day performance. For example:

- doing something that exhibits a values-based behaviour
- reaching or exceeding a personal target
- acquiring a new skill or completing a difficult task
- contributing to a team effort
- coming up with a great idea
- receiving positive feedback from a customer

Frequent

Organisations that recognise their employees frequently (multiple times every month) rate their culture of recognition 34% higher than those companies that don't recognise as often.² There is still a place for the big awards and celebrations, but the cumulative effect of celebrating each day's small victories is far more powerful. Frequency also supports reinforcing and embedding new skills, practices and behaviours.



Timely

Consider the way that sports trophies are presented on the field or court a matter of moments after a championship is won—it's just good practice to celebrate 'in the moment'. For recognition to be meaningful, it must be given promptly after the effort that it is acknowledging. The longer the delay, the more the impact is decreased... and the opportunity for learning and modelling also becomes lost.

Specific

Great recognition isn't just a matter of congratulating someone. To be truly impactful, it needs to provide as much of the 'who, what, why, when and how' as possible (without being overkill). Knowing what someone did and the difference it made has a significant effect on behavioural role modelling and sharing best practice (for example, if someone has come up with a great new way of doing something).

Non-specific recognition: "Thanks for helping me yesterday, Siobhan."

Specific recognition: "Thanks for stepping in to help me get that shipment out yesterday, Siobhan. Because of you, the client received it on time and was really pleased."



Inclusive

To have a true culture of employee recognition, the sharing of appreciation and rewards must extend across your entire enterprise. Nobody can be left out: every location, team, business unit, and individual must be equally likely to have their great work noticed and praised, wherever they work or whatever they do.

Consistent

Finally, alongside inclusivity sits consistency. Not only does recognition have to happen everywhere, it needs to happen consistently and fairly. Far too often in the past, recognition relied purely on the discretion of the individual line manager (and the size of their budget), a practice which inevitably led to some teams feeling that they had been treated less fairly or generously than others. A structured and organisation-wide approach to recognition is essential; with clear visibility of the system being used fairly and in the same way for everyone.

If your recognition strategy is global, you can still adapt programme features to meet local needs, as long as there is parity, and employees feel connected to a unified culture and experience.

Develop your recognition strategy

Your new recognition strategy starts with scoping out the current situation: identifying opportunities and challenges, consulting key stakeholders, and determining needs.

Then you can draw up a ratified list of requirements to feed into your programme design. While it's tempting to want to skimp on the groundwork, the end result will be a better solution, so it's worth the relatively small investment of time and effort involved.

Establish your current position

First you need to understand and map out your current recognition practices (much like mapping out a customer journey) so that you can identify gaps and elevate your strategy to be more effective in future. This means establishing the who, what, how, when and why of every aspect of current recognition across your business, for example: *who is being recognised, who is doing the recognising, who sees that recognition?*

- **Consider** how well your recognition practices are aligned with corporate behaviours, values and goals
- **Compare** your current recognition with the best practice principles outlined in the previous section, and identify opportunities for improvement
- **Conduct** an employee engagement survey to obtain insights that will shape your new programme
- **Consult** with the different employee populations within your business, and find out what's working and what's not from their perspective. Focus groups with employees and managers are an excellent way to discuss feedback from the survey, and colleague involvement in shaping future outcomes is a powerful way to obtain buy-in and support.



Engage leaders and managers

A new recognition programme will impact on every area of the business. When your managers are engaged with its development, they're more likely to effectively communicate and model it with their teams, so getting them on board early in the process is vital.

What's going to be done better?

What difference will it make for individuals?

This means letting leaders know what the programme will do for them, their teams and the business in terms that they relate to. As well as using the information in the first half of this guide as a reference, your research will have highlighted specific benefits for your organisation, which you will have translated into objectives:

- driving a positive performance-based culture
- increase measurable employee engagement
- improve teamwork and sharing of best practice across multiple sites
- bring global/departmental teams closer together
- eliminate inconsistencies and perceived unfairness

Your new recognition programme should not be seen as a replacement or next-generation step up: it needs to be positioned as a game-changer that will benefit the business in terms of culture, performance and resilience.

Align recognition to corporate values and business objectives

Recognition celebrates success, reinforces exemplary behaviour and aligns employees to business objectives and company values. It must be performance-based, celebrating individual and team achievements that help the company achieve goals and uphold its values.

The output of your research and consultation will enable you to determine appropriate recognition criteria for your business, based on these considerations.

Most companies have an established set of values, but not all have formalised the behaviours that demonstrate them.

For example, if 'Teamwork' is an organisational value, the associated behaviours might be seeking others' views; sharing responsibility; supporting team members. Ideally, such values-based behaviours need to be identified so that you can align your recognition programme to them.

Who you engage with to carry out this collaborative process will depend on your organisational structure, but representation should be as wide-ranging as possible in any relevant workshops and discussions, so that the output is seen as employee-owned (rather than as a top-down directive).

Determine the practicalities

Budget

Decide how much you will spend, and how you will tie performance goals to the right behaviours to demonstrate an ROI. Companies typically invest between 1 and 2% of payroll value on recognition, although most focus on rewarding tenure. Your new programme will be an opportunity to reallocate funding to recognition that ticks more ‘best principles’ boxes for your business, particularly reinforcing behaviours, frequency and inclusivity. Improved recognition can also result in savings on the reward budget, too.

Criteria

From your research, you will have determined the behaviours that align with your business objectives and corporate values. Recognising behaviours helps give your programme structure and credibility, adds meaning and relevance for the recipient, and enables recognition to drive success. You will need to clearly communicate the recognition criteria with your entire organisation, so that employees understand what is important and why, and what the relationship is between recognition, behaviours and values.

Accessibility

Your programme will need a mobile-friendly interface that encourages all employees to recognise each other, regardless of location or title. Everyone in your organisation needs to use the programme if it is to make a lasting impact, and recognition can and should happen anywhere, at any time.

Peer-to-peer recognition

Recognition—whether from managers or colleagues—provides employees with unsolicited, positive feedback, so it needs to be organic and seamless. Demonstrate trust by eliminating the need for approvals for peer-to-peer recognition. This is significant step in making employees feel empowered, makes recognition more timely, and drives participation.

1-2% Average payroll value investment on recognition



Visibility

There are three types of recognition: public (that is, organisation-wide), such as an online news feed, group (to a limited audience), and private (one-to-one with a manager). Consider making employee recognition visible to your entire organisation. This will reinforce the right behaviours and provide ongoing momentum as employees see the achievements being recognised and shared by their colleagues—celebrating successes becomes a behaviour in its own right.

Measurement

You will need to know what measures you plan to use for each of your criteria and objectives. A recognition platform with robust reporting capabilities makes it easy to track the effectiveness of your programme, and analyse participation. You can also use the data as a guide for adapting the programme as needs and priorities for your organisation change over time.

Key data points to track include:

- ➔ How many recognitions are happening on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis?
- ➔ Who are the most frequent users of the programme?
- ➔ What correlations are there between recognition and important business metrics?
- ➔ What proportion of recognitions are being made using mobile?
- ➔ What levels of participation are you seeing?

Monitoring these metrics will enable you to identify performance areas that may need a boost, perhaps through a fun campaign, or an updated comms activity.

Technology

A good recognition platform will:

- ➔ **Make recognition fun and easy** with an engaging user experience and mobile-friendly options
- ➔ **Facilitate public recognition** by displaying all recognitions on a company-wide newsfeed so team members can effortlessly view, like, or comment
- ➔ **Incorporate both social and reward-related recognition** so team members can spotlight the value other employees create when they succeed and exhibit positive behaviours
- ➔ **Boost results** by allowing employees to add points to their colleagues’ recognitions in real time
- ➔ **Report on key metrics**, enabling you to measure and evaluate activity and performance

Whatever solution you choose, make sure that all features and capabilities will be consolidated into one employee experience platform. This guarantees a consistent experience for your employees, regardless of country and local currencies, and should enable the addition of other engagement functionality, such as employee voice, reward provision and integration with other HR systems.

Not all technology providers have the same impact. Be diligent in your selection process and talk to providers that can demonstrate a track record of measurable business benefit.

11-Point Checklist For Evaluating Employee Recognition Systems:

1. **Security certification** (ideally to ISO27001 or similar)
2. **Ability to integrate** with other HR and workplace systems (including SSO)
3. **Programme consolidation** – bringing all aspects of recognition together, including reward
4. **Real-time reporting** – enabling measurement and providing actionable insight
5. **Smart budgeting** – including tracking, targets, and optimisation
6. **User experience** – fun, branded, user-friendly and innovative
7. **Thought leadership** – supported by a vendor that understands people as well as technology!
8. **Core values and behaviours** – supported across the platform
9. **High frequency** - facilitating free flow and proven to drive participation
10. **Transparency** – readily accessible public recognition and budgetary accountability
11. **Social recognition** – facilitating encouragement, a sense of progress and interactivity

For more detail on this 11-point checklist, you can download our free *Buyer’s Guide to Recognition Software*.¹⁴



Amplify: the science of rewards

2.8^x more likely to achieve a top BPI if their recognition programme has no monetary value



3.5^x more likely to achieve a top BPI if their recognition programme does have monetary value



People like to group rewards and recognition together, but they’re not the same thing. Rewards can complement recognition, but are not a replacement. Recognition fulfils our intrinsic need for appreciation, belonging, and self-esteem. Rewards are an extrinsic motivator—and if it’s one that the recipient has chosen, then it will be more meaningful, and with it positive memories of your organisation.

Both recognition and rewards are powerful ways of boosting employee advocacy, too: people tend to tell friends and family about what they may have been rewarded with, and the answer to “How was your day?” certainly gets more interesting.

Bersin by Deloitte found that a company is 2.8 times more likely to achieving a top quartile business performance index (BPI) if they are highly effective at recognition with no monetary value, while companies combining recognition with monetary rewards are 3.5 times as likely to achieve a top quartile BPI.

Don’t assume that cash rewards are the best option

Employees tend to associate cash rewards with compensation (pay) instead of achievement. However, *you can give a ‘monetary’ award without giving cash.*

Time and again we find that experience rewards and gift cards are now the most popular with both recipients and their employers, principally because of the freedom of choice that they offer, and the universal appeal for diverse organisations. The philosophy of choice is important: whether to save or spend rewards, whether they can be spent on merchandise or an experience (even one shared with others), or maybe used as a charitable donation.

Whatever rewards you elect to offer, it’s important to remember that there should be no ‘hidden’ mark-ups or shipping and handling costs—the employee must never feel as if they are funding the programme in any way.

Recognition Elements and the Relationship with Top Quartile Business Performance Index		
	Praise and symbolic rewards	Monetary rewards
Recognition approach	Public recognition, with no monetary value, such as thanks, certificates, trophies and plaques Provide paid days off	Give public recognition, with monetary value (for example, company-wide awards) Allow employees to nominate each other for company-wide awards with monetary value
Impact if highly effective at recognition	2.8 times more likely to achieve top-quartile BPI	3.5 times more likely to achieve top-quartile BPI

Communication

The more deeply you can embed your system into 'the way we do things round here' the better adoption—and therefore ROI—will be.

Preparing for a powerful launch

The way you launch your new programme is just as important as the design process. Employees should feel energised and inspired to use it.

- **Involve your internal comms team** (or whoever looks after your internal communications) and work with them to create a communication schedule and plan for the run up to launch, and for a bedding-in period afterwards.
- **Remind leaders from the C-suite down of the value of their advocacy and active support in getting the programme off to a strong start**, and maintaining momentum after launch. People do what they see being done, so leaders and managers should prioritise recognition and set an example right from the start, by recognising employees often, practising both monetary and social recognition. Your platform should offer a 'one click' recognition function, so no leader can use the excuse that they're too busy to do it!
- **Create a unique and engaging identity for your programme that sets the tone.** Most organisations choose to name their programme and give it an identity or creative theme of its own, which can be reflected through all comms and collateral. This can help to drive buy in and engagement, encouraging activation and use of the programme. This works best when it is designed to be a natural and seamless extension of existing corporate branding.

- **Create marketing materials to communicate programme goals and recognition best practices**, aligned with your brand voice and guidelines. Have fun and get creative—this is all about getting attention and encouraging employees to look forward to and use the new programme.
- **Leverage all the channels available to you** including intranet, corporate social media and digital noticeboards. It's important to reach your varied audiences using the channels that they are most likely to use. For example, you may have a significant number of colleagues or users who don't spend all day at a desk or online, so build in offline communication wherever it is needed. You may want to consider roadshows, pop-ups and workshops to create energy and awareness.

Messages you'll want to include:

- The all-important benefits and reasons for change
- Recognition and thanks for those involved in helping to shape the programme
- A reminder of the behaviours that the programme will be recognising—and why

Provide training – not just how, but why, too

Before you launch the new recognition programme, set your admins and line managers up for success by coaching them on recognition best practices, the power of engagement and alignment, how to use the programme, and how to get the best out of their dashboards and reporting tools.

- Too often managers are trained on the how, but not the why. If you can **show line managers what's in it for them**, they'll jump on board without hesitation. Try incorporating recognition training into your leadership summits to walk them through why it's important and how they have a key role in building a culture of recognition.

- **Make sure that the 'how to' processes are documented** (dull, but necessary), and people know where to refer back to, or who to ask if they have a question in the future.
- You'll also need to **update your new starter onboarding, company handbook and policies** to include the recognition programme and use of the platform.

Everyone, from executives, to managers, to individual contributors will need to learn how to use the programme and understand why recognition is an important piece of your culture. It may seem like common sense, but only one-third of companies actually train their people on how, when, and why to recognise peers.

If you have a Learning & Development team who can support with training and engagement in the programme, so much the better.

Launch communications and activities

You'll have already worked with your key stakeholders and employee groups during the research phase, so the programme is unlikely to be a complete surprise. Keeping people posted with progress can be worth doing (as long as the message doesn't become repetitive), while giving them plenty of notice of key dates to look forward to.

Typically, companies use company-wide meetings as a means of announcing their programme and introducing the concept of recognition in terms of company culture.

In tandem with a communications push, think of other fun ways to get employees excited about your new programme, for example, hosting trivia sessions where employees can earn extra points, or simply give employees extra points to send out during the first week of your launch to encourage participation.

There is no turnkey 'ideal' here—your launch schedule needs to work for your organisation, your people and your goals. However, there are plenty of great examples that can be learned from and adapted to suit your business.

When **General Motors (GM)** launched its GM Recognition Program to 67,000 employees, the company did an extensive communications push with targeted emails, intranet posts, newsletter articles, quick start guides, FAQ sheet, and training videos.

As a result, GM reached a 97% participation rate (beating their 80% target) after the first year.

Maintaining momentum

The common denominator amongst the most successful programmes is that they engage in frequent communications and campaigns.

Regular campaigns, perhaps quarterly to begin with, will help to keep the programme front of mind and drive participation. You'll also want to keep colleagues informed of useful features, success stories and future training dates on an ongoing basis.

Make sure you've included an analytics component in ongoing communications with managers, so that they measure employee engagement and participation progress—at an individual and team level—over time. Relevant KPIs might include recognitions sent, recognitions received, monthly active users, activation rates, recognition index, number of leaders recognising/participating, and improvements in engagement scores.

By setting target KPIs every month, managers are held accountable and reminded to monitor and grow their team's engagement.

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Ready to take a closer look?

The global workplace is undergoing a seismic shift, and requires new strategies to drive engagement, alignment and commercial performance.

Recognition represents a significant and powerful opportunity to build and reinforce a success-focused culture that brings people together as cohesive teams; that promotes and reinforces values-based behaviours; and that provides an always-on channel for applauding great performances.



Put a demo in your diary

To see Achievers at work and get a clearer picture of how it could help you deliver your recognition and engagement strategy, simply get in touch and arrange a demo with us at a time and place (virtual or real-world) to suit you.

Just drop us a note or give us a call—we'll be happy to hear from you.

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