

Recognizing Great Work: Ideas to Boost Morale and Retain Staff

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Creating a workplace culture where employees feel truly valued starts with simple, everyday behaviours.

Recognition doesn't have to be expensive or complicated, small actions can make a big impact.

Why Recognition Matters

Recognition has a powerful impact on the health and performance of your workplace. Current rates of turnover in the Canadian tourism industry range from 50% up to 120%¹, and replacing a front-line employee can cost approximately 40% of their salary² - yet nearly 5 in 10 employees are less likely to leave if they are well-recognized², and employees are 65% less likely to leave when they receive high-quality recognition².

When people feel seen they are more motivated, go the extra mile, resulting in lower absenteeism and fewer accidents or mistakes³. It builds a stronger workplace culture and builds somewhere people actually want to be - with improved teamwork and greater resilience. And because employee engagement is that invisible ingredient connected to your bottom line, recognition helps employees feel part of the community and more invested in the success of your business.

Some Common Misconceptions

Many common misconceptions get in the way of effective recognition. People often believe that recognition means you must give employees money or a paid reward; that recognition needs to come from a leader, or that only top performers need to

be recognized. Some assume employees need to be hitting key targets or goals to be recognized, or that recognition programs are too expensive and time-consuming to implement.

What Makes Good Quality Recognition?

5 Pillars of Strategic Recognition²

1. *Authentic* – not just checking the box that you did it.
 - Recognition should feel genuine and specific, not routine or obligatory. Employees can tell when you truly mean it.
2. *Personalized* – you know how the individual likes to receive feedback.
 - Everyone prefers recognition differently. Tailoring your approach, public, private, written, or verbal, makes it far more meaningful.
3. *Meets expectations* – the level and type of recognition matches what you are recognizing.
 - Right-size your response. A simple thank-you fits everyday wins, while bigger contributions may deserve something more.
4. *Fair* – recognition is given without playing favourites.
 - Consistency matters. When everyone has an equal chance to be acknowledged, it builds trust and prevents resentment.
5. *Part of your culture* – it's recurring and just part of



how you treat employees.

- Recognition shouldn't be a one-off event. When it happens regularly and naturally, it becomes a true cultural strength.

While meeting most of the pillars is ideal, employees who receive recognition that satisfies even one of the pillars are 2.9 times as likely to be engaged as those who receive recognition that does not meet any of the pillars.

Ideas for Recognition

No-Cost:

- Saying hello/goodbye, verbal praise, mentioning names in team communication, positive body language, sharing customer feedback, creating an employee Wall of Fame.

Low-Cost:

- Thoughtful onboarding, handwritten notes, professional development conversations or opportunities, in-house rewards, gift cards, surveys, schedule flexibility.

Mid-Cost:

- Paid day off, access to a meditation app, paid learning time, team-building activities and transportation support.

Reminder

- Happy, engaged employees stay longer, work harder, communicate better, handle conflict easier and create magic for your customers. But to work, you must make it authentic, personalized, right-sized, fair and consistent.

To Try This Week

- Choose one no-cost idea and use it once each day.
- Practice giving real-time feedback instead of saving it for later.
- Ask one team member how they prefer to be recognized.
- Share one positive customer comment with your team.
- Keep a simple daily note of one thing you observed someone doing well.

¹[Tourism HR Canada](#)

²[Gallup & Workhuman: The Human Centered Workplace – Building Organizational Cultures That Thrive, 2024](#)

³[Gallup Q12 Meta-Analysis, May 2024](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donna Deiana is a Chartered Professional in Human Resources with over 20 years of experience across industries including logistics, retail, banking, public service, technology, and agriculture. She has successfully led HR functions in both established organizations and start-ups, bringing deep expertise in aligning HR practices with strategic business goals. Donna's focus includes leadership development, workforce planning, organizational design, and employee relations. Known for her ability to identify gaps and implement practical, people-centered solutions, she is passionate about recognizing and developing potential in others to drive engagement and long-term success.



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Karissa Peterson is an entrepreneur and business leader with over 15 years of experience across retail, financial services, agriculture, and technology, spanning both corporate and startup environments. She is known for fostering workplaces where individuals - and the businesses they support can thrive. Her leadership philosophy centers on empowerment, trust, and collaboration, with a focus on helping people find their best opportunities to succeed.

