

The Guide to Modern Employee Recognition



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. What Is Employee Recognition?	2
2. Why is Employee Recognition Important?	6
3. Types of Employee Recognition and Rewards	11
4. How Do I Build a Successful Employee Recognition Program?	16
5. Employee Recognition Tools and Resources	28
6. 11 Unique Examples of Employee Recognition in Action	35



Introduction

What can I expect from this guide?

The Guide to Modern Employee Recognition covers the knowledge you'll need to successfully understand, cultivate, and support a culture of recognition in your organization. You'll learn why effective recognition programs are a critical part of company success. Recognition isn't just a "feel good" initiative; it's a do-good strategy that improves company performance.

We'll start by laying a solid foundation for you to build on. Then we'll walk through the basic steps required to successfully prioritize recognition at your own organization, implement a successful recognition program, and maintain an atmosphere of recognition in any organization.

How should I use this guide?

You can start with any section you find interesting or useful, but we recommend beginning with the fundamentals and building up from there.

If you're already familiar with the fundamentals, this is a great opportunity to brush up on current best practices and gain new insight.

Let's get started!

1. What Is Employee Recognition?

What does recognition look like?

At its core, employee recognition is the open acknowledgment and expressed appreciation for employees' contributions.

It could be a high-five for a job well done, a special shout-out during an all-hands meeting, or even a bonus for meeting a monthly goal.

Recognition can take many forms, but whatever your approach, it's one of the most valuable areas a team can focus on. Implementing the right kind of [recognition program](#) is a critical factor in giving your team the motivation to reach and surpass its goals. [Effective employee recognition](#) gives many successful businesses the competitive edge.

According to [Gallup](#), "When recognition hits the mark, employees are five times as likely to be connected to company culture and four times as likely to be engaged." Additionally, companies with [highly engaged employees](#) are, on average, 23% more profitable, nearly 20% more productive, and have customers that are 10% more loyal.

With that in mind, teams and organizations across the globe are increasingly adopting and rethinking recognition programs.

Who gives employee recognition?

Ideally, everyone in an organization should be able to give each other recognition. That said, the most effective source of a particular piece of recognition is based on the situation and circumstance.



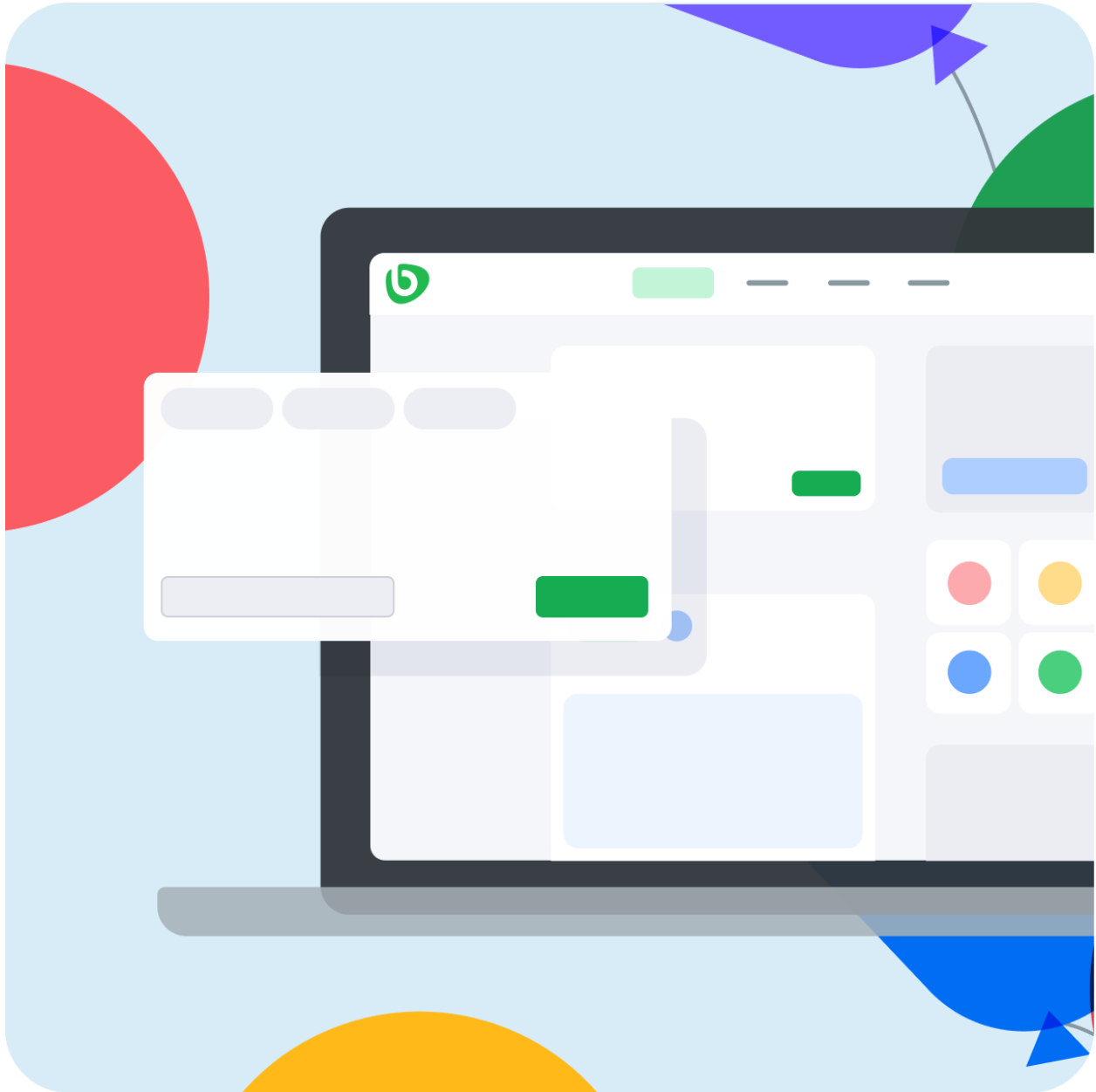
Top-down recognition

Recognition is traditionally given in a top-down system, where an employee's supervisor, manager, or leadership team witnesses and appreciates their contributions.

This is a great model for many reasons: since these leaders are typically in decision-making roles, their recognition often has monetary results, like a raise or promotion. These people are also in the best position to assist employees with their chosen career path or growth plans.

An effective type of top-down recognition is the acknowledgment of key [employee milestones](#). (Think: work anniversary, birthday, or start day.) These moments matter to your employees, so it's especially powerful when their employer recognizes them too.

Giving frequent, real-time, and specific recognition isn't always a simple undertaking for management, however. This is why having a solution to help [simplify and streamline recognition processes](#) is so critical. Plus, if this is your first time introducing a recognition program to your employees, having a tool to support your efforts will go a long way in seeing results.



Peer-to-peer recognition

In most cases, there are so many valuable contributions made on a daily basis that recognition can be even more effective when peers can chime in, too. That's not to say that managers shouldn't give recognition at all. When it comes to completing big-picture objectives, recognition from higher-ranking leaders can emphasize the magnitude of an employee's accomplishment. However, for the day-to-day, it's a good idea to share the responsibility with the rest of the team.

In a [peer-to-peer recognition system](#), managers as well as other co-workers are all empowered to recognize and reward the contributions of everyone else. It's easy for managers to congratulate an employee on their general job performance, but their peers are working right beside them, day after day. They're in a great position to recognize an employee's specific contributions and understand the immediate impact those contributions have.

It's simple. One teammate sees another teammate do something valuable, then praises them for it.

We also can't ignore the benefits of bottom-up recognition. Managers need appreciation, too! Recognition is motivating and insightful for everyone, even those in senior positions.

With 360-degree style [peer-to-peer recognition](#), everyone in the company has a voice in expressing their positive feedback and gratitude. When employees recognize direct supervisors and other leaders for their work, it can reinforce positive leadership qualities and increase visibility into work that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.



Will recognition work for my team?

Yes!

Every team can benefit from a recognition program.

Every team can benefit from better, more frequent employee recognition. Having a dedicated employee recognition program can help ensure that recognition is truly effective on your team.

When you implement a recognition program, you give your employees a way to celebrate one another's achievements. These interactions build stronger team connections, [boost company culture](#), and motivate employees to do their best work. When executed successfully, recognition provides positive peer influence and communicates the notion that good work is valued by everyone in the company.

Looking at the bottom line, companies that score highest for building a "recognition-rich culture" have [31% lower turnover rates](#) than their peers. What's more, employees who don't feel recognized are [twice as likely to quit](#) within a year.

After all, being appreciated just feels good. Why? It strengthens team connections by [releasing the flow of oxytocin](#), the chemical our bodies create when we bond with others. In fact, an average of 84% of Bonusly users gave and or received recognition every single month and [92% was peer-to-peer recognition](#). In addition, in [our recent survey](#) of over 2,000 workers, we found that 65% of participants said they would stay at a job with an unappreciative manager if their colleagues and peers still recognized their work.

A recognition-rich culture is a worthy and achievable goal for any organization, in any industry. It benefits the whole team, from the newest hire to the CEO.

The key to success is understanding how employee recognition works and how to implement an effective recognition program on your team.

What will it cost?

Most organizations without a formal recognition program are already spending money on recognition. From organizing celebratory lunches to bulk-buying gift cards, the labor and costs associated with "manual" recognition can add up quickly. This method of recognition tends to

be sporadic, unpredictable, inequitable, and time-consuming for leaders or HR employees to manage.

An effective program pays for itself and more in the form of increased motivation, engagement, performance, and retention. Not to mention, they don't take a lot of time to manage! Bonusly admins spend 1.5 hours a month managing the program.

-> Read More: [What is the ROI of Recognition and How to Measure It](#)

Why does recognition matter?

Understanding employee recognition is the first step, and in the next chapter, we'll share why employee recognition is not only important—it's *vital*. Read more below to learn about the many benefits of employee recognition and how using a recognition program like [Bonusly](#) can be an extremely effective way for teams to feel motivated, perform better, stay engaged, and more. We invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).

2. Why is Employee Recognition Important?

A well-implemented employee recognition program [has the power to impact many aspects of a business](#) including motivation, engagement, performance, and retention. A non-existent, unintuitive, or poorly-implemented employee recognition program can have the opposite effect, decreasing motivation and even pushing good employees away.

Meanwhile, engaged employees are [beneficial for workplaces in every way](#): they're higher performers, they're connected and committed to their company, and they're willing to go above and beyond their role. In organizations that put a heavy emphasis on praising and recognizing employee achievements, [engagement levels, productivity, and performance increase](#) by between 14-60%.

According to Bonusly's [Employee Engagement and Modern Workplace Report](#), highly engaged employees are over **two times more likely** to work for a company with an employee recognition program than actively disengaged employees. As well, 84% of highly engaged employees were recognized when they went above and beyond at work compared to only 25% of actively disengaged employees. It's no wonder that successful organizations across the world prioritize engagement through recognition.

But the needle hasn't moved much: [63% of employees feel unappreciated by their employer on a daily basis](#). Here's what those organizations stand to lose when they don't prioritize employee recognition:

Motivation

How *well* people work is a direct result of *why* they work. Employees aren't motivated by anniversary plaques or the promise of a gift catalog on their 10th anniversary. [Money doesn't motivate](#) either. So what *does*?

Employees are motivated by meaningful work. They want to work at a company where they feel like they belong and are appreciated for their contributions and connected to their teammates. *That's* why effective recognition programs play a crucial role in boosting employee motivation—they foster that sense of belonging from day one and help form meaningful connections within and across teams.

Studies show that [69% of employees claim](#) they would work harder if their efforts were recognized regularly, demonstrating a direct link between recognition and performance, too. Well-designed recognition programs create a positive feedback loop by reinforcing desired behaviors and achievements. Recognition also helps align employees' efforts with organizational goals, encouraging them to go above and beyond in their roles. When recognition is specific, timely, and aligned with company values, it creates clarity about what success looks like, further motivating employees to perform at their best.

Performance

Speaking of performance, it's easy to understand how recognition impacts employee motivation—which is a driving force in cultivating high-performing teams.

To reiterate: Recognition not only feels rewarding but also inspires employees to perform at their best. It helps new hires quickly grasp what high performance looks like by reinforcing the specific behaviors, skills, and outcomes the company values most. This creates a clear framework for what success means within the organization, setting employees up for long-term achievement.

For instance, imagine someone who feels anxious about public speaking and has been preparing for a critical presentation at a company-wide meeting. The presentation turns out better than expected, and colleagues, along with leadership, praise the speaker's delivery, key messages, and ability to communicate effectively. This recognition not only boosts confidence but also reinforces public speaking skills, encouraging further practice, continuous improvement, and ongoing excellence.

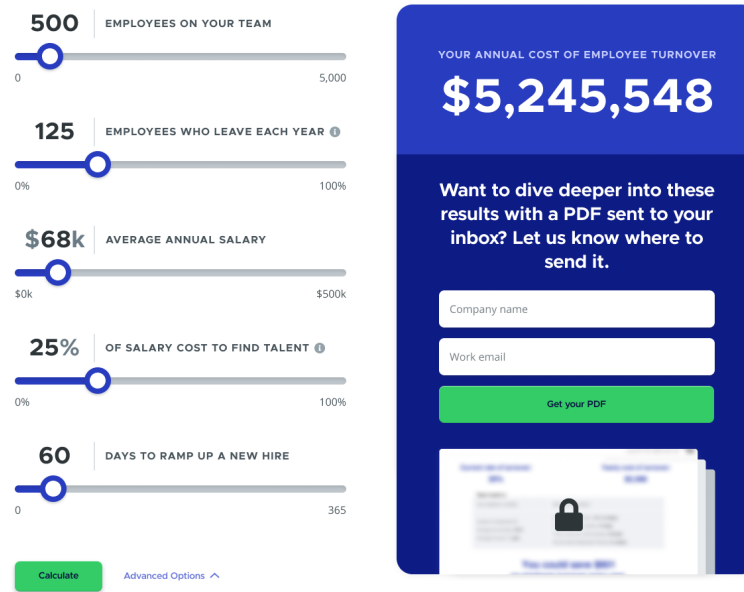
Furthermore, tying recognition to company values demonstrates how those principles translate into everyday actions. For example, if a core value is to "raise the bar," employees can align their efforts with that standard by seeing specific instances where their peers have exceeded expectations. This visibility brings company values to life, providing employees with tangible examples to emulate, which fosters ongoing motivation and drives future success.

Retention

Do you know how much employee turnover costs you each year?

You and your team no doubt monitor spending on advertising, software, and professional development, but you may not know the true [cost of employee turnover](#)—which is why it's probably costing more than you think.

Between writing and posting job descriptions, time spent on screening and interviewing candidates, negotiating salary and signing bonuses, the cost of just *finding* a new employee adds up. Not to mention the time and effort it takes to *onboard* a new employee. You can use our [cost of employee turnover calculator](#) to understand your baseline, but it's important to remember that like an iceberg, much of the cost associated with turnover is hidden.



Indirect costs of employee turnover include decreased productivity, lost historical knowledge, and lower morale. When an employee leaves, the team absorbs additional responsibilities which leads to burned out, unhappy team members, and a bruised company culture. Even once an organization has hired someone to fill an open position, that new employee needs to be oriented and trained. While [welcoming a new team member](#) is typically an exciting time, it's important to note that productivity will likely drop with the addition of a new team member before it goes up.

Fortunately, recognition is something all employees appreciate and respond to. It's a [critical step in reducing turnover](#).

In a study by Bersin & Associates, organizations with recognition programs that were highly effective at improving employee engagement had [31% less voluntary turnover](#) than those with ineffective recognition programs. Furthermore, [46% of workers say they have left a job due to feeling unappreciated](#).

Productivity

Productive employees benefit companies in every way, from increasing profitability to optimizing resources. Productivity is very closely tied to companies' profitability, and is a top driver of success at modern companies. According to [Bain & Company](#), the best companies are

40% more productive than the rest, and have operating margins 30%-50% higher than their industry peers.

What this means is that taking the time to appreciate employees pays huge dividends to your bottom line. Recognition boosts employee engagement, which then increases productivity. One study referenced in [Inc.](#) even discovered that 78% of employees would work harder if they were recognized more often. When you add inspiring employees to do their best into the mix, productivity skyrockets:

“If satisfied employees are productive at an index level of 100, then engaged employees produce at 144, nearly half again as much. But then comes the real kicker: inspired employees score 225 on this scale. From a purely quantitative perspective, in other words, it would take two and a quarter satisfied employees to generate the same output as one inspired employee.”

Eric Garton and Michael Mankins, [Harvard Business Review](#)

Giving employees the right feedback to know which of their efforts are most appreciated helps everyone better understand the impact of their work and what to prioritize. This doesn't mean you need to give a standing ovation to every employee who made it to work on time, but it's crucial to let everyone know exactly how (and how much) each of their contributions move the organization forward.

Morale

Employee morale is the glue that holds your company together. It's a crucial part of any organization, and should be a top concern on your priorities list. With low morale, nearly every aspect of an employee's contributions will suffer. Increased morale, on the other hand, [inspires greater productivity, creativity, and overall satisfaction.](#)

What's the difference between employee morale and [employee engagement](#)? Although they're related, they're not the same thing. Employee morale is typically associated with feelings of well-being and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, here's how Bonusly co-founder and CEO Raphael Crawford-Marks describes employee engagement:

“Engaged employees are typically described as passionate, committed, and enthusiastic—not just about their job, but the company they work for and its overall mission and goals. An engaged employee is aware of both immediate, tactical goals, as well as long-term, strategic ones, and proactively works to advance both.”

It's a subtle difference, but it's there. Engaged employees may be satisfied with their jobs, but contented employees are [not necessarily engaged](#) with their work. These workers risk losing any emotional connection to their work that they may have had, and their teams suffer from poor productivity. These are the “clock-watchers” and the “hangers-on.” They can become dead weight for the company. Thus, having high employee morale is the foundation upon which employee engagement can grow and thrive.

So how do you build that foundation? A SHRM report found that 65% of employees agree [respectful treatment of employees at all levels](#) is a significant contributor to their job satisfaction. Because respect can be shown in many ways, personalized approaches make a considerable difference. For example, frequent and visible praise promotes inclusion and a sense of belonging at work that increases job satisfaction. Along those same lines, [another research study](#) revealed that, 60% of employees value recognition as much as they value money.

That's why you feel great after a high-five.

Purpose

Recognizing employees' work and their impact on the team encourages a [sense of purpose](#). This type of transparency helps employees understand how their work ties into the bigger picture of the company and how their contributions matter. Purpose at work is important. In fact, [70% of employees](#) agree that their sense of purpose is defined by their work and 90% say that they would be willing to take a pay cut to do [more meaningful work](#).

As humans, we're motivated by knowing how our work helps others, and recognition is a key part of that. This idea applies anywhere from working toward a company's broader mission to promoting cross-team collaboration.

It's easy to get caught up in day-to-day work. Frequent and visible recognition reminds everyone that they're all working toward a shared goal.

Communicating clear team goals and values through public recognition also [fosters a sense of community](#), which helps keep employees engaged and alleviates some uncertainty about roles and responsibilities. By recognizing someone for embodying company values, you develop your organizational culture and reinforce objectives in an intentional way.



Next steps

Building a culture and environment based on employee recognition improves each of these important areas, but it's crucial to understand how the foundation fits together before starting to build the rest. In our next section, you'll learn about how recognition can take shape at your organization.

We also invite you to learn more about [Bonusly's employee recognition and rewards platform](#) and [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich organizational culture.



3. Types of Employee Recognition and Rewards

Recognition and rewards will vary from organization to organization, and how you appreciate employees will depend on your unique company needs. Your team could be motivated by a company-sponsored outing, a thoughtful email, or a gift card to their favorite store. It's up to you to understand how to most meaningfully appreciate your team members and with what rewards.

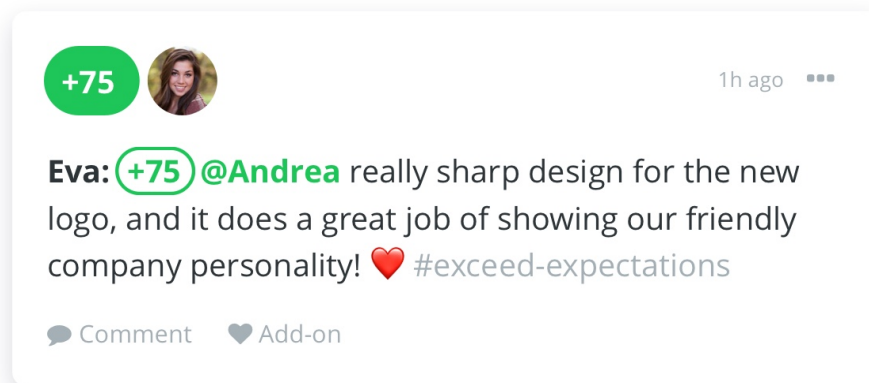
Types of Recognition

Bonuses

There are many types of bonuses, ranging from small to large.

Small bonuses, sometimes called spot bonuses because they're given "on the spot," are small monetary rewards given frequently by one colleague to another in recognition of a valuable contribution. Although small bonuses can be given by managers to their direct

reports, they can also be given by other colleagues, and even from a direct report to a manager.



Small bonuses provide several unique benefits. Like spot bonuses, staff recognition in the form of bonuses can be given in the very moment that a valuable contribution is made by an employee. Employee recognition given in the moment has the greatest potential for impact, because the action is rewarded almost immediately, when it's top-of-mind.

Because these bonuses are small by nature, everyone can give them out often, providing multiple positive instances of employee recognition without dramatically altering an employee's compensation.

Their on-the-spot nature dictates that spot bonuses are given at an irregular cadence, in contrast to annual and quarterly bonuses.

Written praise

Writing thank-you notes can not only show appreciation, but is tangible proof of an employee's contributions. Written praise is a flexible method of recognition and notes of praise are almost universally appreciated, whether written or sent as electronic communication.

Verbal praise

Verbal praise is perhaps the oldest, and longest-standing form of peer-to-peer recognition in the workplace. Verbal praise is given by colleagues, generally in an ad-hoc fashion, in recognition of a staff member's valuable contribution.

Although nearly always informal in nature, verbal praise is occasionally solicited as part of a formal [staff recognition program](#).



When should recognition be given?

We'll cover the characteristics of effective recognition in a later section, but here's a sneak peek of one of the main components—timeliness. It's important to recognize

employees at key moments, whether that's right after a project has been completed, on their work anniversary, or even their birthday.

Events

Employee's first day

Should you recognize employees before they even start working? Absolutely. Besides, we think the stressful process of interviewing, negotiating, and making it through first days or weeks definitely deserves some kudos! The benefits here are twofold: new employees feel welcomed to their team right away, and existing employees are able to break the ice immediately.

Birthdays

[Birthdays](#) are a special occasion for a majority of people. If you're in a 9-5 job, chances are employees will be spending a good amount of that special day in the office. While everyone has different preferences around the level of attention they'd like to receive, it's not a bad idea to show them that they are recognized and valued.



Employee Appreciation Day

[Employee Appreciation Day](#) is a semi-formal holiday founded by Dr. Bob Nelson, a founding board member of Recognition Professional International. Over the past 20 years, other

companies have embraced the unofficial holiday, paying homage to their employees on the first Friday of March.

As a low-key “holiday,” Employee Appreciation Day is a great opportunity to recognize employees without the pressure of annual or quarterly reviews. Celebrate Employee Appreciation Day with small company-funded events like barbecues, office parties, or with fun decorations

Milestones

Work anniversaries

[Work anniversaries](#) are one of the most common uses of modern employee recognition, but they're often poorly executed. We consider work anniversaries an [epiphany moment](#), and they should be treated as such. Reaching a work anniversary is a key milestone when employees reflect on their past, contemplate their future, and assess their well-being at their workplace. So receiving a simple gift card or plaque can feel impersonal, leaving an employee disillusioned about the work they put into the company.

A work anniversary should represent another year of a job well done, and should be meaningfully recognized. It's a great opportunity to thank the employee for the specific impact they've made over the past 12 months and over the course of their career. But don't just say, "You've made a big impact this year." Explain exactly what the impact was, why it matters, and how crucial their work is to the team, the organization, and the people it serves

Project completion

It's always a weight off the shoulders when a project is completed, launched, or published, so this is also a great time to recognize all the work that went into the process. Be sure to recognize team members in a timely manner--recognition has much more impact in the moment than when it's delayed.

Year end

A year end or annual bonus is financial compensation given to employees in addition to their base pay. Annual bonuses are given once per year, usually at the end of the fourth business quarter. They can be given for a multitude of reasons, but are usually based on goals, either the performance of the organization, the individual, or both. Depending on

the organization or industry, annual bonuses are sometimes expected as part of an employee's total [compensation package](#).

Quarterly review

Quarterly bonuses are similar to annual bonuses, but are metered out more frequently, on a per business quarter basis. Quarterly bonuses are most commonly given as part of a heavily performance-based compensation model. Sales organizations or teams are common users of the quarterly bonus structure.

Building a successful recognition program

Now that you've got a solid understanding of what recognition is, why it's important, and how it looks, you're probably curious about how to build your own successful employee recognition program! In the next chapter, we'll teach you how to do just that.

We also invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).



4. How Do I Build a Successful Employee Recognition Program?

It's no coincidence that many of the world's most successful organizations use [employee recognition programs](#). As we covered in [chapter 2 of this guide](#), when recognition programs are

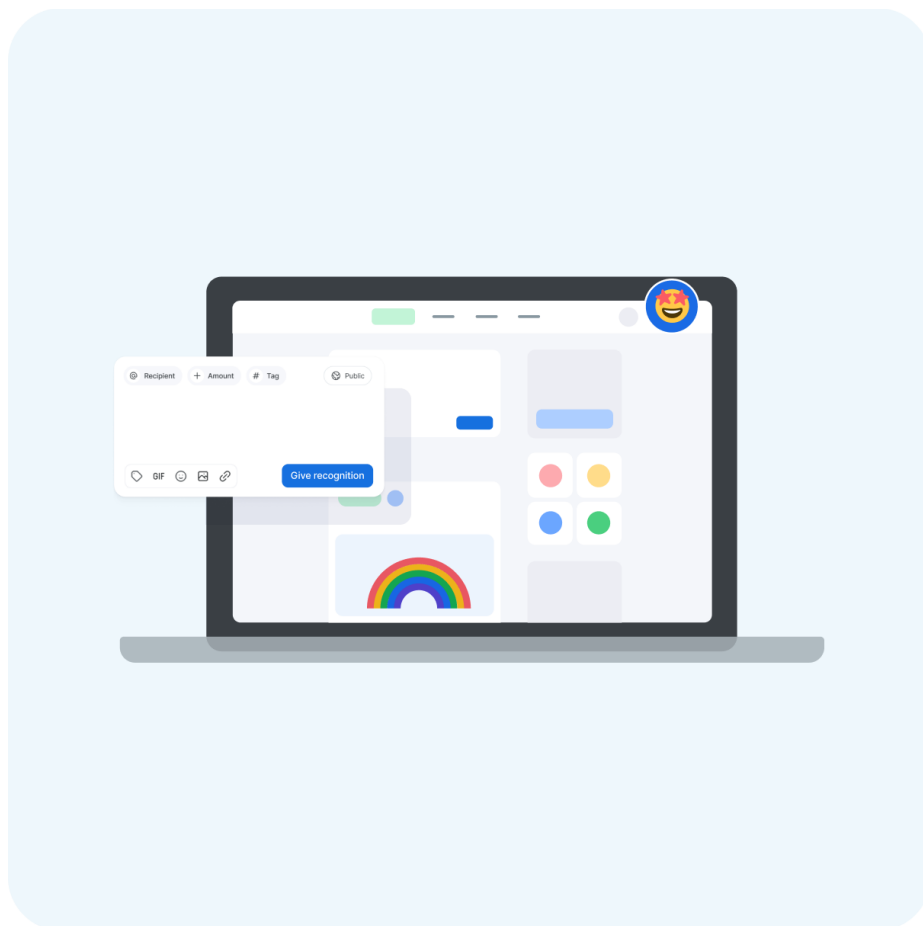
used correctly, they can enrich company culture, increase employee engagement, reduce turnover, and provide a fulfilling employee experience.

Sound good? Good. Now, where do you start?

Well, you're in the right place! 🎉

We're experts at helping organizations introduce recognition programs to their employees, and here are our tips to get buy-in:

- [Develop a case for recognition](#)
- [Build a team of champions](#)
- [Understand the characteristics of effective recognition](#)
- [Follow recognition program best practices](#)



Develop a case for recognition

Start by establishing a business case for an employee recognition program, tying your expected project outcomes to desired business outcomes. Ask yourself what problems an employee recognition program can solve and how solving those problems contributes to business objectives. [Show your leadership team](#) that the benefits outweigh the costs.

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the research-based [benefits of employee recognition](#) and its exhaustive effects on improved motivation, performance, retention, engagement, productivity, morale, and [purpose](#). Then crunch some numbers! For example, you can use an [employee turnover calculator](#) to determine how much your business will save using an effective recognition program.

How much does a good recognition program cost to administer? It might surprise you to learn that recognition programs don't have to be expensive to be effective. 81% of companies that include a recognition program in their budgets spend [less than 1%](#) of their payroll budgets on these programs. You should also account for the costs of any rewards.

You'll also want to understand the hidden costs and logistics of homegrown programs. Running to the store every now and then to buy gift cards for your team of five and handwriting notes for each person might be relatively simple to start, but when your team grows to 50 or more, these manual programs can become unwieldy, requiring a whole new level of planning, oversight, and consistency.

Fortunately, [rewards and recognition software](#) can integrate with existing tools, automate rewards fulfillment, and even [manage work anniversary bonuses](#).

-> Read More: [How to Maximize the ROI of Recognition](#)

Build a team of champions

Once you receive buy-in from leadership, your next step is to find your team of champions to help you implement the program. Seek out leaders who will help conceptualize, promote, communicate, implement, and reinforce your organization's new recognition program.

When building your team, look for folks with the following characteristics:

- Interest in the program
- Positioned as a team leader
- Knowledge of program benefits
- Ability to prioritize the program
- Positive track records

Program champions with these characteristics will be closest to the heartbeat of the organization and will provide the most helpful insights. They'll also be in the best position to ensure program success.

Understand the characteristics of effective recognition

Before implementing any employee recognition program, it's necessary for everyone involved to understand the characteristics of effective recognition:

- [Timely](#)
- [Frequent](#)
- [Specific](#)
- [Visible](#)
- [Inclusive](#)
- [Values-based](#)

Timely

Recognition is most effective when given in a timely manner. Unfortunately, the association between contribution and recognition weakens over time. Aim to give recognition as soon as possible to produce a clear connection to positive behavior.

Waiting to recognize a valuable contribution can result in faded impact of that recognition and lost opportunities to encourage the same kind of positive behavior. Too many employees only hear recognition at their annual review.

Frequent

Frequent recognition translates into [more engaged employees, stronger business results, and lower turnover](#). Employees make contributions every week, and failing to provide regular feedback about those contributions increases the likelihood of individuals feeling undervalued in their role.

You don't need to wait for a huge milestone or achievement to give recognition. It's important to celebrate the small victories, and research backs that up. Take this stat into account: [71%](#) of highly engaged employees work in organizations that recognize employees at least once per month.

Specific

Why is it important to call out and recognize specific contributions?

Specific recognition helps employees understand exactly which of their actions contributed to their team's goal. Being specific means acknowledging the details and context of a task or project, not just a "Thanks, great job!". When feedback isn't specific, it risks coming across as insincere or unclear.

Naturally, this type of praise should occur soon after any contribution. Remember: a quick "great job last month" isn't useless, but it denies the recipient some crucial feedback.

Visible

Private recognition can be effective, but public recognition offers several additional advantages. For one, being recognized publicly magnifies its impact. Sharing praise with a wider audience helps everyone learn about the work being done across the organization, facilitating collaboration and highlighting solutions that might otherwise go unnoticed. It also gives other colleagues the opportunity to join in the recognition, reinforcing positive behavior.

[Visible recognition](#) provides examples of commendable behavior, actions, and contributions that others can repeat. Additionally, that visible recognition can bring to light innovations or challenges that spur valuable discussions within teams.

Inclusive

Inclusive recognition helps foster a sense of equity, belonging, and psychological safety for all employees. Showing employees they belong should be a top priority for leaders, and understanding the actions and people who are recognized means understanding what is really valued in your culture. Who is recognized most frequently and for what?

A powerful way to ensure more people are recognized is to diversify the parties responsible for [giving recognition](#). Recognition from all levels provides more opportunities for contributions to be appreciated.

When employees are empowered to recognize peers, praise occurs more frequently while also carrying more context and nuance. A 360-degree recognition program with a foundation of peer recognition provides a better understanding of what a whole team and organization considers valuable while removing the bottlenecks imposed by top-down recognition and [breaking down team siloes](#).

Values-based

Values-based recognition encourages teams to work toward the same vision. When sharing positive feedback, think about how a contribution lines up with your values. If your team culture is really based on a shared set of values, reinforcing those values through praise should be a deep-rooted habit.

Recognition based on values ties tangible actions to the foundation of an organization. It becomes more meaningful and helps a team work toward the same goal, reinforcing positive activity. Can you recall your own [company core values](#)?



6 employee recognition program best practices

1. Define clear recognition program objectives and criteria

Employers should be clear about what behaviors or actions they'd like to see from recognition programs and how they impact business objectives. Whether you're starting a new employee recognition program or updating an existing one, challenge your team to answer important questions.

What types of behaviors will be rewarded? Reference your business objectives and decide which behaviors to incentivize, and remember that effective recognition is tied to organizational values! Reward deliverables completed on time if lateness is a challenge, and applaud cross-departmental collaboration if your organization is stuck working in silos.

How should desired behaviors be rewarded? It's important to know your team and reward behavior accordingly. In general, praise should be public and can be a great learning opportunity to the whole team. Tying that praise to a tangible [employee reward](#) or experience can remind employees of their achievements long after praise is given.

How often should recognition occur? Effective praise is frequent, so it's important to regularly recognize your team. Giving recognition on the spot is a good habit, and reiterating that praise during [team meetings](#), especially for special achievements, can amplify the effects of recognition. Don't forget about milestone events, like birthdays, work anniversaries, and [Employee Appreciation Day](#).

Who should recognition come from? Recognition has traditionally been given top-down by managers. If that's what you have capacity and budget for—great! Peer-to-peer recognition, coming from all levels can be even more effective. In fact, peers are the top influence in driving colleagues to [go the extra mile](#).

2. Use a multifaceted rewards and recognition program

Many employers assume that employees always want money instead of non-tangible rewards, but research suggests that's not necessarily true. [Research by Deloitte](#), for example, identified two different types of recognition:

- Praise and emblematic recognition
- Token and monetary rewards

They found that both types of recognition are important to employees, as “this varied approach helps to constantly and frequently reinforce desired employee behaviors.”

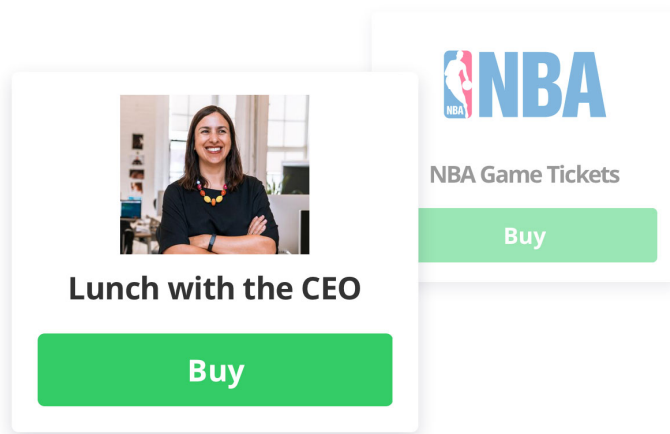
It might not seem intuitive at first, but imagine receiving a bonus without any note or explanation. How would you know how to replicate the behaviors that led to the bonus? You'd have no idea what you did correctly to earn it—and how to avoid doing something incorrectly. Remember to be specific!

Similarly, it's beneficial to understand the difference between [extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in the workplace](#). Whether the praise or the monetary reward is the primary form of recognition, both approaches complement each other.

3. Give employees voice and choice

Make it fun! Don't start with the assumption that you already know what everyone wants. Engage your employees to better understand the types of rewards they're most interested in.

Once you've drafted [ideas for creative rewards](#), it's easy to get employee preferences by sending a survey and asking everyone to rank the options. Giving employees a say in rewards redemption can increase their personal investment in the program and make recognition even more enjoyable. Brainstorming unique rewards can also be a [fun team building activity](#)!



Think about how rewards will be distributed, as well. If you offer gift cards as rewards, make sure employees will use and enjoy products or services from those businesses. [Consider these custom reward best practices](#) before committing items to your catalog.

Do your employees want to share their rewards with the world? Offering the right employee rewards can help you win employee advocates. It's the transitive property of rewards: employees get something they want something they can leave the office with and share with their family and friends. The public recognition they received at work leaves the office with them in its own unique form

4. Ensure an effective launch and implementation

When introducing a new system or approach, it's important that communication around the is clear and the implementation is as painless as possible. Any team participating in a new program should be clued in on that program's purpose, how to use it, and when it will take effect. Think about the following factors when rolling out your program:

Align your organization on recognition

Leadership should be aligned on the program's purpose, especially when rolling out the program. Teams and employees may start to feel jaded if no one is taking it seriously. Imagine being on a team where the manager withholds recognition and doesn't think it's important, while watching the team next door receive reward after reward—it would be demoralizing.

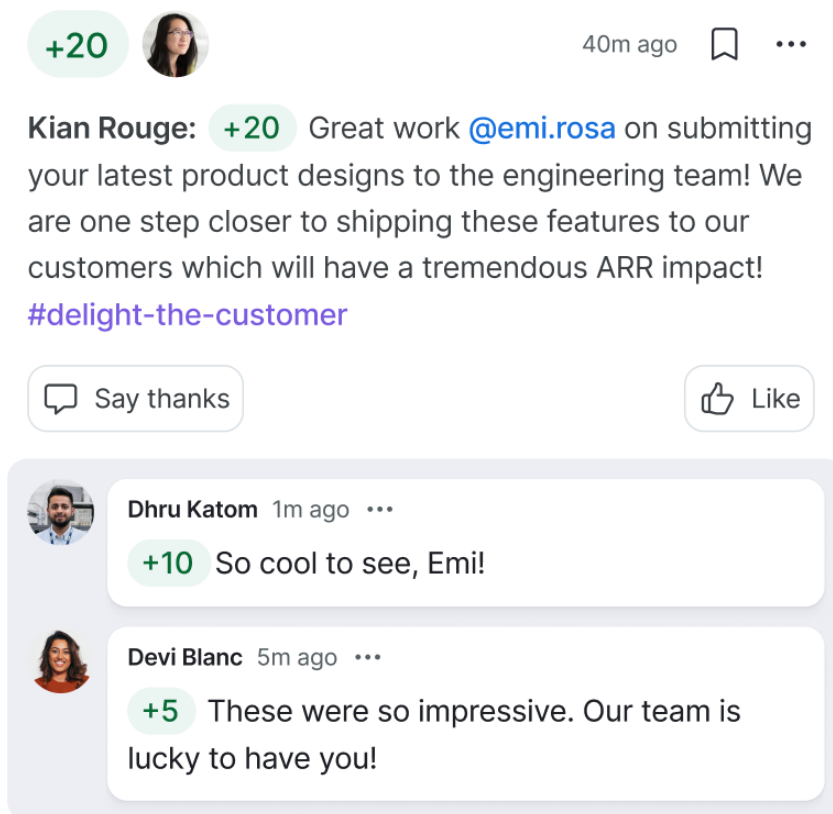
Employee recognition should also be aligned with organizational objectives and goals; creating recognition programs around behaviors that the business doesn't value leads to confusion and

may have the negative impact of directing energy away from company goals. Consider it a reinforcement of existing priorities.

Make recognition programs visible

Recognition programs should be highly visible within organizations that truly value recognition, right? Employees should see when their peers are recognized, and data from that recognition should be visible for teams to help improve communication.

Note that different types of workforces may prefer different methods of communication. For example, front line employees at a manufacturing plant may prefer to get important updates via [specialized kiosks](#), administrative staff at an accounting firm might prefer email, and employees at a tech startup might prefer a collaboration tool like [Slack](#).



Plan for a seamless, multi-pronged, and consistent delivery of your program

With current technology, how recognition is delivered is another critical element. How will recognition or rewards be delivered in your organization?

Embed it in your processes. If you regularly communicate through a collaboration tool like Slack, find a program that integrates with it. Use existing team meetings to reiterate recognition where appropriate, and consider using an automated system to fulfill rewards.

More than one method of communication should always be used to introduce the program. Thinking about announcing the program at an all-hands meeting to share a strategic overview followed by followed by an organized team training session with practical guidance.

Managers should also communicate with their teams in smaller team meetings about the program and discuss the initiative. Since not all teams or individuals work in the same location, managers should include [remote workers](#) via video conferencing to share program information.

Managers should also communicate with their teams in smaller team meetings about the program and discuss the initiative. Since not all teams or individuals work in the same location, managers should include [remote workers](#) via video conferencing to share program information.

5. Measure your recognition program's effectiveness

Recognition programs impact many different areas of an organization. Using a measurement system like [employee net promoter score](#) can provide a useful framework to measure the effect of recognition on factors like employee engagement and morale.

Successful recognition programs will impact other factors like performance, productivity, and turnover. You can use a number of ways to analyze changes in those areas, like [survey tools](#), [brief interviews or feedback sessions](#), and performance management software. Gather feedback on a regular basis, and use it to adjust your program where necessary.

To take it one step further, use data from your recognition program to inform other business decisions. Research [social connections](#) to determine if any team or individual is isolated, review how teams are connected, and facilitate collaboration where needed. Are there teams with outstanding behavior? Study them to understand how to take those learnings to other departments.

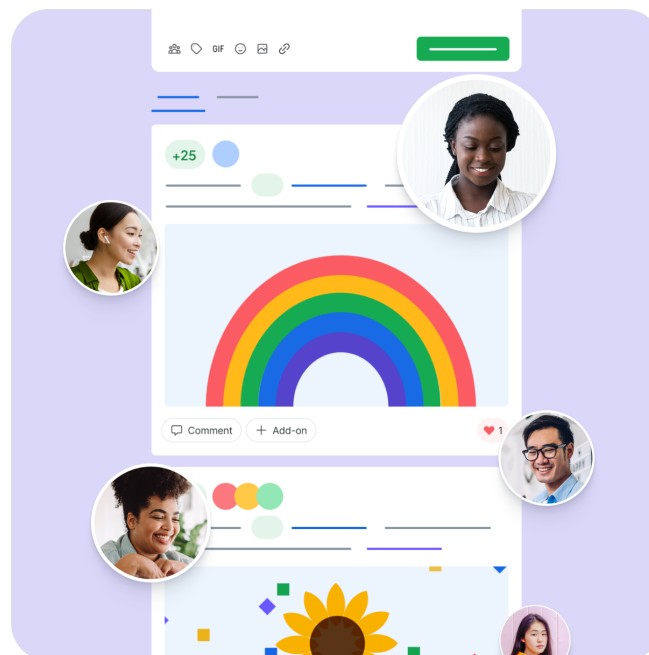
6. Revisit and revise regularly

No program is perfect, and even excellent programs should be well-maintained to remain effective. Soliciting program feedback quarterly can help you determine whether or not employees still value the types of rewards they're receiving. Leadership feedback will provide further insight into whether or not the program is impacting job performance and business outcomes in a positive way.

In addition to evaluating the program, you should understand which outcomes are needed most. An annual engagement survey will help you identify the company's primary opportunities for improvement based on your company's ever changing employee population.

Once you've collected actionable data, make improvements where possible. For any desired improvements that you are unable to make, be sure to explain why (e.g. timing, cost, redundant to other initiatives, etc.). All organizations aren't the same, and recognition programs should be tailored to your team. As you develop your program, consider how much admin time is available to administer it and how your employees work.

Read more about employee recognition best practices in [5 Best Practices for Employee Recognition Programs](#).



Implementation

Implementing a successful employee recognition program might seem imposing, but by following the above advice, you can simplify and streamline your efforts. In the next chapter, we'll discuss aspects of tools that can make implementation even better for your team.

Employee recognition is a powerful way for any organization to succeed, and using a specially-designed employee recognition program like Bonusly can be an extremely effective way for teams to feel valued, perform better, stay engaged, and more.

We also invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).



5. Employee Recognition Tools and Resources

Successfully introducing the right kind of recognition tool can be the critical factor in differentiating your organization. Because of the [strategic benefits of recognition](#), teams around the globe are increasingly using technology to power their recognition programs, integrating recognition into their culture.

What makes for a good employee recognition tool? It should:

- Meet your team and employees where they're at
- Provide employee rewards
- Include robust people analytics
- Scale easily

Meet your team where they're at

An effective recognition tool should be able to easily integrate into your team's workflow. Start by thinking about where your team works, the devices available for work, and the software used for collaboration. In the modern workplace, teams are frequently located in different places, keep different office schedules, and often see each other intermittently.

If your team is centrally located in an office, a highly visible [dashboard](#) could be a great tool. On the other hand, a distributed team that travels frequently might prefer a [mobile app](#) with push notifications.

Integrations

Easy ways to bring recognition tools into your existing workflows are through integrations. Pay special attention to tools that offer integrations with your collaboration tools HRIS systems, SSO solutions, and other areas.

Collaboration Tools

[Slack](#) is a useful tool for both real-time and asynchronous team communication. It also includes file sharing, contextual search (to help find important conversations and files anytime), and a huge list of app integrations. [Slack's Bonusly integration](#) makes it an excellent tool for employee recognition by allowing users to broadcast recognition activity to their team, and even give small bonuses without breaking their workflow.

We love Slack. It's our go-to communication and collaboration tool for nearly everything, and we frequently use it to give employee recognition.

Every time someone receives a small bonus, the entire company sees it pop up in our #recognition channel. Since we all practically live in Slack, it's a highly-visible way for everyone to see all the great work that happens on a daily basis, no matter which location they're working from.

Other great collaboration tools include [Microsoft Teams](#) and [Google Hangouts Chat](#), which also have [Bonusly integrations](#).

HRIS integrations

Your HRIS system includes valuable data about your employees, from their birthdays to organization connections to contact information. Many employee recognition tools can sync data between systems to reduce the administrative effort required to implement and maintain programs.

When looking for a solution to help manage your team accounts automatically, consider systems like BambooHR, Namely, Workday, Zenefits, or ADP. Bonusly has [integrations](#) for these and more.

Other integrations

[Zapier](#) is a powerful platform that allows you to easily connect the different apps you use to automate tedious tasks. [Zapier's Bonusly integration](#) allows teams to integrate recognition into Zapier's catalog of over 1,500 different apps, including Hubspot, Small Improvements, and Asana. [Here are some templates](#) for inspiration.

Screens

From big to small, think about the screens your team works on.

We have offices in New York City, Seattle, and Boulder, CO. To make sure we're always aware of the great work everyone is doing despite the distance that separates us, we project a [dashboard](#) displaying all the recognition going on throughout the day. It's impossible to miss, and there's something special about seeing your achievements posted in a larger-than-life format.

For our smallest screens, we use [iOS](#) and [Android](#) mobile apps to make sure we don't miss recognition in action.

Usability

When you think you've found a tool that seems to fit the bill, test its usability. Is the experience intuitive across platforms? Think about the different people who will ultimately use the tool on a regular basis.

Provide employee rewards

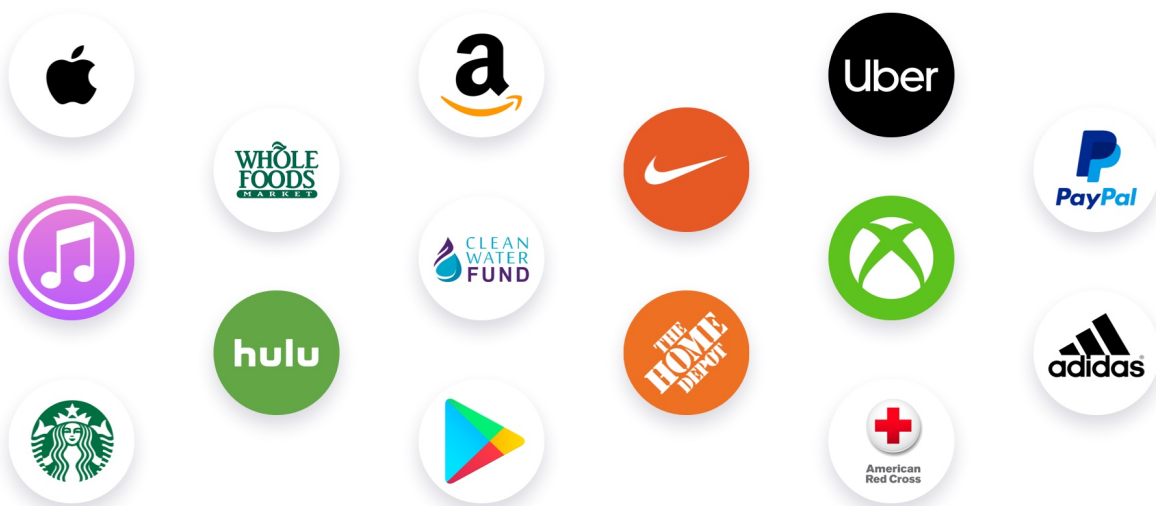
Modern [employee recognition](#) is powerful. It can be even more impactful if you include meaningful rewards.

Effective employee recognition tools allow users to recognize each other with praise backed up by real-world rewards. [Our research shows](#) that even small rewards with real-world value encourage users to give recognition more frequently and by more people than.

According to [Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends report](#), "employees respond favorably to agile compensation programs that provide raises, bonuses, or other incentives more often than the traditional once-a-year rewards system." One study even "found that employees who receive regular small rewards, in the form of money, points, or thanks, are a staggering eight times more engaged than those who receive compensation and bonus increases once a year."

In order to enjoy all the benefits of frequent recognition (i.e., increased employee engagement and retention), you'll need to encourage your employees to engage with your recognition program and make recognition a habit. The promise of rewards can be enough to get your employees over the hump that [adopting new tech tools](#) so often presents. By linking recognition to rewards, you can actually facilitate more meaningful exchanges.

Learn more about the link between recognition and rewards with this post: [Accelerate Your Employee Recognition Program with Meaningful Rewards](#).



Include robust people analytics

How do you gauge the success of your staff appreciation program? By measuring it!

There are a number of great tools available to help you determine the effectiveness of any recognition program you implement. They can provide insights into [recognition trends](#) in your organization and help you learn where team members excel with detailed analytics and reporting.

Look for tools that allow you to easily see team engagement in aggregate as well as which employees stand out as recognition and engagement. Use data to understand team dynamics, who's recognized most frequently, and what they're being recognized for.

Bonusly Employee Analytics

[Bonusly's employee analytics](#) uses the rich social data produced by the giving of small bonuses and transforms it into useful data, predictive metrics, and timelines. It includes [organization graphs](#), participation charts, and word clouds, as well as information on recognition by team, location, and company values.

Bonusly [employee analytics](#) can help you to see which employees are standing out as excellent contributors, and which employees might need extra support to help them succeed. You can also measure the effectiveness and overall engagement of your staff recognition program.

Scale easily

Running a recognition program requires time and effort from your team. It includes plenty of planning, oversight, and consistency for everyone involved. Fortunately, tools can help your team easily scale recognition programs.

Look for tools that can help you onboard new team members quickly, require little maintenance, automate rewards redemption, and provide strong integrations. Finding the right tool will help you minimize the administration time needed to build a recognition-rich culture.

To make things even easier, look for tools that can manage [work anniversary bonuses, birthday bonuses](#), and other [automated or manual awards](#).

Employee Recognition Resources

There are many excellent information resources available to help you improve all aspects of organizational culture, from employee recognition to employee engagement. Here are a few great reads:

Bonusly Blog

[The Bonusly blog](#) covers a range of useful topics including leadership and management tips, creative employee reward ideas, and employee engagement advice with downloadable templates and resources throughout. You'll find engaging infographics and regular interviews with industry experts and culture leaders who share their insights on a range of important topics.

Here are some of our most popular posts on employee recognition:

- [7 Benefits of Giving & Receiving Employee Recognition](#)
- [6 Effective Employee Recognition Examples](#)
- [What is the ROI of Recognition and How to Measure It](#)
- [How to Maximize the ROI of Recognition](#)
- [How to Make Employee Incentive Programs Work for Your Company](#)

Gallup

Gallup, a workplace consulting and global research group conducts a ton of research on [employee engagement](#), which means they have a lot to say about [employee recognition](#), too. While the [Gallup blog](#) extends beyond employee recognition, it's a go-to resource for a myriad of aspects that effect the global workforce.

TLNT

[TLNT](#) is a publication focused on HR news and insights. There are articles ranging from HR basics, to more complicated subjects like onboarding techniques, narrowing

workforce skills gaps, and improving employee retention.

Next Steps

Now that you know what to look for in employee recognition tools and have a few resources to bookmark, we invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).

When you're ready to learn about unique examples of employee recognition in action, take a look at our guide's next section.



6. 11 Unique Examples of Employee Recognition in Action

Now that you have the tools you need to build a culture of appreciation, it's time to get started.

It's not always easy to come up with creative ways to recognize and reward your teammates for their great work, so we put together a list of unique examples from some of our favorite companies across the globe.

Just like the people and contributions they're celebrating, these recognition techniques are unique. Most of these examples are not complete strategies in themselves—they're part of a larger strategy incorporating the [key characteristics of effective employee recognition](#):

- Timely
- Frequent
- Specific
- Visible
- Inclusive
- Values-based

Andrew Schrader | [Chobani](#)

1. Employee recognition and rewards platform

"Everyone gets caught up in their day-to-day work, which is why it's great to have [Bonusly](#): feedback and instant gratification never get old."

"When I receive a bonus and I wasn't expecting one, I get all cheesy about it. There's this thought that runs through my head: Oh, wow, I implemented this project and I bug everyone to participate, so of course I know it's important, but it still feels good to receive a bonus!"

"Having the ability to recognize someone immediately is the most valuable part of Bonusly. Whether you have 20 employees or 2,000, it doesn't matter."

"More than 75% of Chobani employees actively use Bonusly."

"Bonusly has definitely had a measurable impact on our Great Places to Work® survey results. Just a few months after we launched Bonusly, our score in the recognition category had the biggest improvement!"

2. Monthly emails to highlight praise

We send a "[This Month on Bonusly](#)!" email to managers to promote an ongoing culture of recognition and encourage them to continue recognizing their direct reports. Everyone's participation is meaningful.

Victoria Melcher | [BigCommerce](#)

"We've been so thankful to Bonusly for helping us allow peer recognition to come through organically—it's just been so helpful for keeping us together," says Victoria. "It builds up our team morale and lets us signal to each other that we're going to continue to lift each other up and we're going to continue to strive together."

3. Company Core Values

"All recognition in Bonusly is connected to hashtags of our company values: #teamonamission, #makeadifferenceeveryday, #thinkbig, #customersfirst, and #actwithintegrity. With Bonusly, we can easily tie our behaviors to our values every day. It fosters a culture that you want to be a part of."

"Company values matter because employees face tough decisions every day. The right way isn't always the easy way, and you want employees to do what's right for your organization every time. This has been only more true during the pandemic, when people have been working from home and have less daily guidance or interaction with their managers and team members. With Bonusly, we're able to reinforce those values and have employees champion what it means to be a part of BigCommerce."

Lindsay Kampmeier | [Ordermark](#)

4. Virtual celebrations

"Our sales team had established norms for celebrating in Slack when they close deals, so they continued doing shout-outs that way when we went remote. But other teams didn't have those traditions in place, so the majority of individual contributions weren't getting recognized or surfaced to the whole organization."

"I saw that Bonusly could address both of these concerns. It was a really impactful tool for us to adopt while we were remote and needing new ways to engage with one another."

5. Award nominations

"We leverage Bonusly Analytics to choose the recipients for our more formal monthly Ordys Awards. Bonusly has made our nominations process more equitable and data-driven."

"We used to try collecting nominations from employees," says Lindsey. "Now, we look at who received the most recognition for a specific Company Value Hashtag in the last

month. It's a far more reliable and fair way to recognize and reward those top performers."

Becky Cantieri | [SurveyMonkey](#)

6. Visible recognition

"Feeling valued and recognized is important to the human condition. Recognition delights us and energizes us to do more"

"We were one of the earlier adopters of Bonusly. It's core to our recognition program and a thoughtful way to connect the work of our employees to the value they deliver for our customers."

"Recognition helps ensure employee efforts are visible and that they feel appreciated."

Nicole Pigeon | [Solugenix](#)

7. Inclusive, visible recognition

Inconsistent recognition wasn't motivating their hybrid team

"It's hard for call center employees to stand out," says Nicole Pigeon, the Operations & Account Manager for Customer Support Services at Solugenix, an IT services firm.

"When a call center support member has an exceptional call, the customer might be pleased, but leadership doesn't necessarily hear from that customer. With our old recognition program, it was hard to see, let alone celebrate, these wins."

"It was also discouraging that we didn't recognize everyone equally. Our work environment includes on-site and remote workers, and sometimes the contributions of our remote employees were less visible than their on-site counterparts."

"Bonusly gave everyone an equal voice. Managers and leaders suddenly had visibility into positive customer interactions and ways that people help each other—all things they couldn't see before."

"We saw high rates of adoption and positive feedback about Bonusly from the start," Nicole says. "People are impressed that our engagement is so high, but I'm not surprised. Our company is all about supporting and recognizing one another, regardless of where someone works. That does wonders for morale."

8. Connecting teams after acquisition

When Solugenix acquired the company Nicole and her 100-person team worked for, they added their HR and IT support staff to Bonusly to encourage everyone to become familiar with their new colleagues.

"We had to scale quickly and effectively, and we used Bonusly to help us achieve that," Nicole says. "It helped integrate our folks into the larger team in a natural way."

9. Morale and motivation

"Bonusly worked wonders for team morale during the fast growth and uncertainty of acquisition and the quick move to remote work during the pandemic," Nicole remarks.

"We saw increased engagement as people began to work from home and praise each other on the platform. Everyone can view that praise, which is great exposure for individuals and teams."

"It's pretty simple—when people are recognized for their hard work, they feel better about their job, and do better work."

Scott Orn | [Kruze Consulting](#)

10. Managing burnout

During the busy tax season, when the IRS and state tax agencies were experiencing extreme delays that impacted Kruze Consulting's clients, Scott used Bonusly with Frame AI to automate recognition for customer wins. Frame AI is a product that analyzes customer interactions to generate actionable data about customer sentiment, customer effort, and team effort.

With Bonusly and Frame AI together, Scott says his team has "a way to publicly recognize people who jump into the fray to put out fires, meet urgent deadlines, solve specific issues, and handle behind-the-scenes work." In the midst of an increasingly frustrating situation for Kruze's clients, managers of customer success were equipped to encourage and champion their teams.

"This work often goes unnoticed, and the last thing we want is for people to feel their contributions aren't appreciated," he says.

Matthew Lane | [Reach Engine](#)

11. Sense of belonging

"Our most recent cohort of interns asked to be part of Bonusly because they felt like they were missing out. Something as simple as giving our interns their own Bonusly accounts has helped them feel like they're part of our team."

"Some of them are only here two days a week and some of them work remotely, but Bonusly gives them that sense of togetherness and belonging that I think is extremely important in maintaining a healthy corporate culture."

Final thoughts

[Employee recognition](#) is the most impactful way to build a high-performing culture. The world of work has changed, and employees are motivated by different things, crave connection, and want to perform at their highest. HR and company leaders need understand the value of true employee recognition when it comes to building modern companies that succeed.

By reading this guide, you should now have all the tools you need to start building a culture of recognition on your team. By ensuring that employee recognition is effective by making it timely, frequent, specific, visible, inclusive, and values-based, your team and company will quickly experience its many benefits.

A dedicated employee recognition program like [Bonusly](#) makes building a recognition-rich culture on your team simple. We invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).

Start building a recognition-rich culture

With those examples in mind, consider how to implement your own unique and creative employee recognition ideas, and start building a recognition-rich organizational culture!

Try employee recognition with Bonusly

At [Bonusly](#), we use peer-to-peer recognition to celebrate milestones, reward wins, connect teams, and reimagine performance.

Every month, users get a Bonusly allowance, and with that allowance, users can give bonuses to their peers, direct reports, and managers to recognize their contributions in real time.

Employees can redeem the points they've earned in our [extensive digital reward catalog](#).

The catalog is full of rewards options like gift cards and charitable donations, but it's completely customizable. You can add unique rewards like extra PTO, company-branded gear, or lunch with the CEO.

Each time someone is recognized by a colleague for doing something valuable, the whole team is notified and is given a chance to join in on the celebration.



We invite you to [start a free trial](#) or [join us for a demo](#) to learn more about how you can start building a recognition-rich [organizational culture](#).

Bonusly is the only employee recognition solution that improves performance by motivating teams, empowering managers, and simplifying HR. More than 3,400 global organizations including DoorDash, Toast, Seat Geek, and Magna-Tiles, use Bonusly's recognition solution to build high-performing teams.

Learn more about employee recognition at [Bonusly](#)