

# Recognition for Your Scaling Business

7 Things You Need to Know  
Before You Buy



workhuman\*



# **Culture** is your competitive advantage. **Recognition** is how you protect it.

The best places to work aren't always the ones with the most outrageous salaries or trendy perks.

They're the ones where good work gets noticed. And where employees can see the connection between what they do every day and your growth and success. That feeling is harder to manufacture than it looks – and harder to hold onto than most scaling companies expect.

Whether you're actively building that kind of company or trying to hold onto the one you have, the challenges are real. And if you're reading this, you've probably already run into at least one of them.

Maybe your current recognition approach is starting to wear at the seams. It takes more admin time than it should. Managers aren't using it consistently. You can't tell whether it's actually working. New hires aren't absorbing the culture the way they used to.

The stakes are high. You're growing. Your talent is poachable.

**The skills your organization needs are shifting faster than your ability to see what you already have.**

And your ability to lead through change depends on whether your people feel equipped, aligned, and invested in where you're going.

These are exactly the problems a well-built recognition program solves – not just by making people feel appreciated, but by doing something more useful: acting as an MRI for your culture and an operating system for the behaviors you want to see more of.

**Recognition is a feedback loop, running continuously in the flow of daily work. Nothing else in your HR stack does all of that at once.**

And the same program that solves the operational problem – the admin burden, the manager inconsistency, the adoption gap – can also set you up for long-term success.

You want a recognition program that earns every dollar you spend on it, and actively helps you scale your culture and business. This guide is about finding it.



## ONE

# If recognition takes too much work to run, it can't scale.

Here's the most common failure mode in recognition: a program that made sense at 200 people starts to buckle at 1,200. The admin burden grows faster than headcount. HR is manually tracking anniversaries, chasing managers to participate, fielding questions about points and redemptions.

What was supposed to reduce overhead has created new overhead – and the program is losing participation because nobody has time to micromanage it. [Gartner's research](#) found that 55% of HR leaders say their current technology doesn't meet their evolving needs, and over half can't measure the ROI of what they've already invested in.

The answer isn't a bigger team. It's a program built to run itself. Automated milestones, end-to-end fulfillment, centralized administration – so the recognition happens consistently whether HR is watching or not.

Workhuman's own customer data shows that high-frequency recognition – 7+ awards per employee – correlates with turnover as low as 4.1%, compared to 8.5% at lower frequency.

As a scaling company, you need to control voluntary turnover, to be sure you're not losing the exact talent you need to advance the business. You can't get there with a program that requires constant manual intervention to keep moving.

Workhuman's Admin Hub, automated milestones, and end-to-end rewards fulfillment mean HR doesn't own the logistics. The program runs itself.



## TWO

# If it's not easy for managers, they won't do it.

Fast-growing companies promote quickly. There's no other way. The result is a management layer full of first-time managers – people figuring out leadership in real time, navigating expanding spans of control, and a talent market that gives their best people options.

This is where culture fractures most often – in the middle.

Gartner's 2025 HR priorities research found that 75% of HR leaders say their managers are overwhelmed by expanding responsibilities.

And nearly 70% report their current leadership programs aren't equipping managers for the realities they're facing.

Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace report found that lower engagement among managers accounts for most of the recent downturn in employee engagement. Our own 2026 Humans at Work Barometer research found that 46% of managers say they lack adequate time and/or resources to support direct reports.

Inconsistent manager recognition is one of the most common and least-discussed sources of team-level disengagement. "Great job, Chris" feels like recognition. It isn't. It carries no specific signal, connects to no value, and reinforces no behavior.

**The downstream effect is exactly what you'd expect: inconsistent recognition, uneven team cultures, pockets of disengagement that HR can't see until they surface as attrition.**

When recognition is specific and values-linked, Workhuman data shows employees are 5x more likely to repeat the recognized behavior. Recognition built into the management workflow – prompted, specific, and values-connected – is the fastest way to raise the floor on manager quality without adding another training program to an already-crowded calendar.

Workhuman's Recognition Advisor coaches managers in the moment – prompting more specific, more inclusive recognition without adding to anyone's workload.



## THREE

# If you can't show impact, it won't survive budget scrutiny.

At a fast-growing company, every investment is scrutinized.

Leadership wants proof of return. Investors want metrics. A CFO who believes in culture is still going to ask what the people budget is actually buying.

This is where most recognition programs fall short, and where Workhuman is different. Recognition is one of the only people investments that can pay you back in signals – providing insight into key talent, skills, behavior and performance outcomes that matter to leadership.

But that only happens if you've deployed a strategic solution that is able to capture and synthesize those insights.

Recognition is also a lever for driving behavior, and for showing the role of culture as a business differentiator.

Gartner's research here is telling: in a July 2025 survey of CHROs, fewer than half – just 47% – said their culture actually drives employee performance today. Recognition data closes that gap. It turns “we have a great culture” from a narrative into evidence.

Participation rates, manager consistency, values-linked recognition frequency, skills, alignment to strategic initiatives – these aren't soft metrics. Workhuman's 2025 customer data shows that 54% of employees who received 3+ recognition awards subsequently increased their performance ratings.

Recognition is a leading indicator for retention, performance and growth.

Workhuman's analytics and lightweight reporting give HR the story leadership wants – and the early warnings they need.



## FOUR

# Rewards matter more than most teams expect.

Companies often get the appreciation side of recognition right but then underestimate the power of reward and redemption. A bad reward experience can tank the whole recognition cycle – whether it is generic, slow, or simply not that great in the employee’s home currency or country.

Workhuman's 2025 Rewards Study confirms what many HR teams have learned the hard way: monetary rewards matter.

**When people have a very positive rewards experience, they're 2x more likely to feel motivated and 19x more likely to recommend their organization as a great place to work.**

Moreover, when rewards carry real monetary value, engagement rises by 21% and belonging by 28%.

And the frequency, value, and choice of those rewards directly drive whether employees stay engaged with the program. When rewards are weak, even the strongest recognition moments don't have lasting impact.

A poorly thought through redemption experience and poorly supported store can also be a huge burden for already busy HR teams, who become a de facto customer service operation for frustrated employees.

The reward experience is what helps appreciation stick. Don't outsource it to a third-party catalogue.

Workhuman takes full responsibility for both flywheels – recognition and redemption – end-to-end. Global assortment, meaningful rewards, and white-glove fulfillment, all handled.



## FIVE

# Your best people are being recruited right now. Recognition keeps them.

In a competitive talent market, your best employees aren't making decisions on salary alone. They're looking at where they are most likely to feel valued, seen, and confident in their future. Companies with strong cultures have a natural recruiting advantage, and recognition is a significant part of how they maintain it.

The numbers are clear on both sides of this equation.

According to Gallup, replacing a leader or senior manager costs up to 200% of their annual salary – and that’s before you account for the skills, institutional knowledge, team momentum, and cultural credibility they take with them when they leave.

The risk isn’t just the cost of replacing that top talent. It’s the loss of key skills that you need to grow the organization.

Recognition done well also creates the emotional case for staying: I am noticed here. My work matters here. The people around me see what I contribute.

Workhuman research shows that employees who receive high-quality recognition are 45% less likely to leave within two years – and new hires who receive recognition in their first 6 months are 5x less likely to leave in year one. In a talent-dense, poachable workforce, this is the margin between momentum and churn.

The companies that win on retention aren’t always the highest payers. They’re the ones that figured out how to make people feel like they’re somewhere worth staying.

Workhuman’s Reward Stories and Years of Service programs create recognition that lands at the moments when people are most likely to be asking themselves whether to stay or go.



**SIX**

# **Culture doesn't scale automatically. Recognition does.**

There's a moment most scaling companies hit where culture stops being ambient and starts requiring maintenance. The values that spread through osmosis when everyone fit in one room now need actual infrastructure. New hires absorb job descriptions fine. They take longer to absorb what you actually are.

Culture is under the same pressure. Research from [McKinsey](#) shows that companies with strong cultures during growth phases are 2.3x more likely to sustain performance over 5-year periods – but the ones that get there do it deliberately, not accidentally.

## Culture at scale gets built moment by moment, in the daily interactions between people and their work. Recognition is where those moments live.

When someone is recognized specifically, publicly, in connection with something real, three things happen at once: the recipient feels seen, the behavior gets reinforced, and every colleague who witnesses it absorbs a signal about what good looks like here. That signal, repeated across hundreds of interactions every week, becomes the connective tissue between who you say you are and what employees actually experience.

Workhuman research shows that employees whose recognition is explicitly tied to values are 129% more likely to understand how their work contributes to organizational goals. That's culture operating as the business: visible and self-reinforcing as you grow.

You didn't build this culture by accident. Don't let growth kill it.

Workhuman's Social Recognition, Culture Hub, and Topics keep values alive in the flow of work – not in a handbook.



## SEVEN

# Recognition data tells you things about your talent you can't find any other way.

Fast-growing and fast-changing companies are often scaling leadership faster than they can identify it.

What is being worked on in the organization? Who is carrying the work? Where is your succession bench? Are you making decisions based on data or whoever is loudest?

Research cited by McKinsey has found that 90% of CHROs say analytics is a core component of HR strategy, but only 42% say they actually have a data-driven HR function.

The signals companies rely on are lagging or incomplete – annual performance reviews, 360 feedback, engagement surveys are all designed to be retrospective and periodic. They tell you what happened. By the time the data lands, some of the people it describes have already started looking elsewhere. Recognition data is a real-time record of what great behavior looks like in your company through the eyes of people witnessing it. It is your best source of human data.

Every specific, values-linked recognition moment is also a data point – who recognized whom, for what behavior, tied to which priority, at what point in their tenure. Over time, those moments tell you how work actually flows through your organization: who is emerging as a connector, where culture and strategy are aligned, where they're diverging.

**In an era where AI is increasingly part of how work gets done, that human signal is more valuable than ever – not less.**

AI can process patterns, automate workflows, and accelerate decisions. What it can't do is generate the authentic, continuous, bottom-up data that a well-run recognition program creates. The organizations that figure out how to harness both AI's analytical power and the data that recognition surfaces will have a workforce development capability that their competitors simply can't replicate.

You don't have to build a data program to get there. Just run a recognition program your employees actually use, and the intelligence builds as you grow.

Workhuman's Future Leaders, WHiQ Snapshots, and Talent & Skills Insights surface the people and patterns that matter – in accessible, actionable form.

# Why Workhuman for scaling companies

## **We save your team valuable time.**

Most scaling companies come to us managing a patchwork – a homegrown anniversary program, a Slack channel for shoutouts, a swag vendor who doesn't integrate with anything. Or they're coming off a platform that worked at 200 people and isn't working anymore. Either way, someone on your team is spending hours keeping it running. Workhuman consolidates all of that into one platform that runs itself. Automated milestones, end-to-end fulfillment, centralized admin. Your champions get that time back and spend it on the work that actually moves the business.

## **Easy to launch, easier to keep running.**

Implementation fear is real – and it's one of the main reasons recognition programs stall before they start. Workhuman has a dedicated launch team, a customer success partner who knows your business, and a platform designed so that once it's live, HR isn't the one keeping it alive. Managers use it. Employees feel it. The program runs itself.

### **Friction-free adoption, measurable from day one.**

Whether you're replacing something that isn't delivering or standing up something new, the adoption risk is real. We've built for it – integrations with the tools your people already live in, recognition that happens in the flow of work rather than on the side of it, and reporting that shows program health from the start. You'll know it's working before the next budget conversation, not after.

### **Makes the business case for culture.**

Participation rates, recognition patterns, values reinforcement, retention signals – specific and defensible. The data that turns “we have a great culture” from a story into evidence leadership can actually use.

### **Gives you talent intelligence from day one.**

What starts as a recognition program becomes, over time, a live picture of who is driving impact, who is emerging as a leader, and where the culture is holding or starting to drift. No additional implementation required.

Workhuman helps mid-sized companies use recognition to scale culture without slowing down – turning appreciation into a daily habit that reinforces the behaviors you want, keeps teams aligned to what matters most, and helps you retain the talent you can't afford to lose.

# Your team needs better infrastructure for growth.

As a mid-sized, growing company, you have something most larger organizations have spent years and fortunes trying to recover: enough momentum that culture still feels like an asset rather than a problem to manage.

**The question isn't whether to invest in it.  
It's whether the investment you make will pay off.**

Workhuman recognition does three things simultaneously that nothing else in your people stack can claim: it makes your employees feel genuinely seen, it gives you a real-time signal on whether your culture and values are showing up in actual behavior, and it builds the talent intelligence that lets you lead your workforce – not just manage it. That combination is rare. And in a world where AI is reshaping how work gets done and the competition for skilled, aligned people has never been more intense, it's also increasingly decisive.

The right recognition program doesn't slow you down. It's what lets you move fast with confidence – knowing your culture is holding, your best people are invested, and you can see clearly enough to lead what's coming next.

Talk to Workhuman to see how recognition can power your growth – and then let's get your program up and running.

[Schedule a call.](#)

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