



# Building a Culture of Recognition

A CASE STUDY

workhuman\*

For SSOE, a globally recognized architecture and engineering firm with more than 75 years in the business, premium results and service are of the highest priority. With 19 locations in three countries, SSOE is dedicated to delivering exceptional value to clients worldwide. The firm's focus on delivering value-driven project solutions is recognized by its clients – 150 of SSOE's clients have been working with them for more than 20 years. Such a proven track record demands consistency in innovation, value, and quality in every aspect of the business.

Understandably, finding and retaining top talent is integral to helping SSOE achieve its goals. To continue delivering the high level of service its clients have come to expect, the company's employees need to feel valued and, when the organization grows, SSOE needs to be able to flex to meet the moment without sacrificing the quality of the employee experience.

**In 2016, SSOE partnered with Workhuman® to build its custom employee recognition platform, C3,** a nod to its vision of designing and building the future for its clients, colleagues, and communities. The launch included Workhuman's Social Recognition® and Service Milestones® to continue strengthening peer-to-peer relationships as well as between employees and managers at SSOE.





**We're on a journey, like every other company. We're constantly telling the story of recognition and leading with gratitude. Being able to say 'thank you' through the Workhuman platform lets everyone see that gratitude – and it's so critical.**



JENNIFER WUERTZ

Vice President and Director, Human Resources  
SSOE



# The challenge

Gallup and Workhuman research has found that, to see outcomes like retention and employee engagement improve, recognition needs to be fulfilling, authentic, personalized, equitable, and embedded in company culture. SSOE needed to look at how it could elevate employees throughout the year in a way that was honest and impactful.

A platform to recognize and reward the efforts and accomplishments of employees is a great baseline, but SSOE needed that platform to have a global reach. That need was twofold.

**One, SSOE needed to ensure moments of recognition were seen by everyone, no matter where they were working. And two, the company needed to make rewards equitable with varying standards of living in all the regions it has offices.**

Outside of recognition, SSOE wanted to mine all the moments that could potentially provide a lift to employees through appreciation. Knowing so many of these moments happened in one-on-one meetings with managers and employees, SSOE wanted to find a way to easily document and highlight those moments so they were not lost to time or memory.

Another obvious lift opportunity was a date significant to each employee: their work anniversary. With talent retention critical to SSOE's success, a way to systematically celebrate these milestones would help showcase the long-lasting connection employees felt toward the organization.





## The solution

SSOE partnered with Workhuman to onboard recognition to its global workforce. Instantly, anyone in the organization could nominate colleagues for values like collaboration, agility, quality, integrity, and social responsibility. And with the social feed, everyone else in the organization could see it, like it, and leave their congratulations.


“Before we implemented Workhuman, we had a disparate program where managers could give rewards like gift cards,” said Jennifer. “We didn’t have a clear line of sight into why people were being recognized – and how others could aspire to those same behaviors. That peer-to-peer recognition was missing.”

A Standard of Living Index embedded in the tool assured employees that rewards would be equitable no matter where they resided.

**The key for SSOE in building and scaling recognition across the organization has been to maximize the frequency of recognition.**

It isn't so much about the monetary value of the recognition – it's about the impact of frequent, ongoing recognition that touches every individual at SSOE.

“Over the years, I've heard Eric Mosley talk so many times about the lift you get when give recognition,” said Jennifer. “If you give a \$500 award, you get a certain amount of lift – but what if you give five \$100 awards, just think about that same lift you're getting. How much more are your employees able to do and able to give – and how much more successful is your business?”

A man with dark hair, wearing glasses and a light blue button-down shirt, is smiling while looking at a laptop screen. He is sitting at a desk, and his hands are on the keyboard. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a modern office or workspace with large windows.

## The results

Since onboarding Social Recognition in 2016, SSOE has continually found ways to embed recognition across the organization.

In 2023, SSOE conducted an all-employee award for Employee Appreciation Day and the total awards placed for the year reached 95% of the organization.



SSOE has also given holiday awards, service awards, special cash awards, referral awards, and licensure awards. In short, the company has evolved with Workhuman, embracing new features and flexing the platform's full functionality.

SSOE has seen various returns on its investment. One of the most critical outcomes has been the improved retention of new hires during COVID.

**Across the organization, SSOE has observed that when recognition is high, engagement is also high.**

And, at the end of the day, highly talented, highly engaged employees will help SSOE continue to design and build the future for its clients, colleagues, and communities for many years to come.

**To learn how recognition can drive  
retention and engagement at your  
company, get in touch.**

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