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workhuman*

Using Recognition to Uplift Wellbeing and Daily Emotions



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Every company's greatest asset is its workforce. However, more than any other part of an organization, people are complex. How someone shows up and performs in their role every day is a function not just of their work environment, but all the things they think about and experience in their life.

Successful leaders and managers recognize the need to prioritize the wellbeing of their employees not only to make a positive impact on their lives but also to maximize their organization's productivity and resiliency for the future. Thriving employees are the backbone of thriving businesses. However, in the emotional climate of the world today, it can be particularly difficult to provide this support.

Gallup's latest trends reveal that the daily emotional experiences of U.S. employees have only improved somewhat from the lowest points of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the percentage of employees who experience a range of negative daily emotions remains elevated relative to historical benchmarks.¹

Stress and worry, in particular, have lingered at higher levels. Almost half (49%) of all U.S. employees now report feeling stress a lot in the previous day. Research unveiled in the *2024 State of the Global Workplace* report also indicates that one in five employees globally experienced loneliness a lot in the previous day.²

An organization's bottom line is impacted by how well its leaders and managers support the wellbeing and emotional experiences of its employees. Research from Gallup and Workhuman has identified strategic recognition as a key practice with a unique ability to uplift employee wellbeing and facilitate stronger social connections. The following details the positive relationship between high-quality recognition and daily emotional experiences. It explores how organizations can leverage recognition to communicate and align their mission, values and expectations in support of their employees' wellbeing.

Recognition Positively Influences Emotional Experiences

Strategic recognition is a dynamic tool associated with higher wellbeing and better daily emotional experiences. More specifically, when employees receive high-quality recognition as defined by the five pillars of strategic recognition, they are more likely to experience positive emotions and less likely to experience negative emotions. However, few employees enjoy the full extent of these benefits.

Receiving authentic recognition in the workplace can feel akin to a heartfelt compliment, often providing a boost to energy and positive emotion for the day. On a deeper level, workplace recognition affirms the value of one's work and provides foundational reassurance that the effort an employee is putting in is seen and valued by their organization. This reassurance helps quell feelings of stress and anxiety that can run rampant in organizations where employees work without clear expectations or support.

Just **11% of employees** report having recognition experiences that fulfill four or five pillars of strategic recognition.



1 Gallup, Inc. (n.d.). *Indicators: Employee wellbeing*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/394424/indicator-employee-wellbeing.aspx>

2 Gallup, Inc. (2024). *State of the global workplace*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

Recognition can also be given amongst employees to efficiently form new, meaningful connections and further enrich existing relationships. The CDC finds that social connection can improve one's ability to manage stress, anxiety and depression and help prevent serious chronic illnesses.³ Embedding recognition as a major component of culture and combining it with meaningful feedback can aid organizations in building strong, connected communities that enable employees to develop bonds with one another.

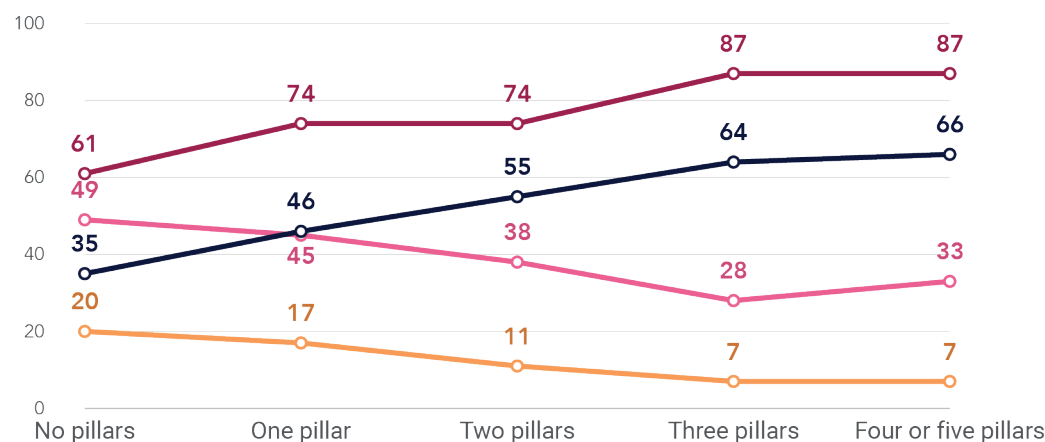
Leaders and managers do not need to perfect their feedback and recognition practices to start positively impacting employee wellbeing in their organizations. Fulfilling just one pillar of strategic recognition moves all daily emotional experiences in the right direction and each additional pillar provides an incremental gain.

Recognition Pillars' Influence on Daily Emotions

Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?

% Yes

• Happiness • Energized • Stress • Loneliness



Recognition is particularly potent in addressing loneliness. Those who receive recognition that fulfills at least four of the five pillars of strategic recognition are 66% less likely to experience loneliness on a daily basis, as compared to those who receive recognition fulfilling three or fewer pillars. Recognition's community-building power can be a vital antidote for communities, workplaces and individuals afflicted by the loneliness epidemic.⁴

3 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, March 27). *Social connection*. CDC.gov. <https://www.cdc.gov/social-connectedness/about/index.html>

4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023, May 3). *New surgeon general advisory raises alarm about the devastating impact of the epidemic of loneliness and isolation in the United States* [Press release]. HHS.gov. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

Aiming Recognition Toward Wellbeing

Wellbeing encapsulates much more than just feeling more positive emotions and less negative emotions day to day. Employees are more likely to thrive when their work is engaging and connected to their organization's mission. Organizations can leverage recognition and feedback to serve as a reminder of *why* an employee comes to work every day and advocate for balance between work and life.

Well-recognized employees, specifically those who receive recognition that fulfills at least four of the five pillars of strategic recognition, are 4.4 times as likely to strongly agree that their job gives them purpose in their life. When they also strongly agree that they receive valuable feedback at work, there is a 71% chance they strongly agree their job gives them purpose.

Frequent check-ins to provide high-quality recognition and feedback give employees consistent affirmation that their work matters and makes a real difference for a customer or someone in their organization. Providing recognition that ties to the impact of an employee's work can be especially critical for employees who may not have the chance to directly see their work delivered to a customer or stakeholder.

High-quality recognition also reinforces care for a person as a whole, not just as an employee. The latest Gallup-Workhuman survey finds that those who strongly agree that recognition is an important part of their organization's culture are 4.2 times as likely to strongly agree that their organization cares about their overall wellbeing. Recognition leads the way for other best practices and closer managerial relationships, which can compound and further positively influence employees' lives and wellbeing.

As stewards of an organization's culture, managers play an important role in modeling recognition that promotes employee wellbeing. For example, if an employee is recognized only when they provide deliverables that require overtime to complete, they may begin to believe their manager expects them to put in overtime to complete all their projects. If left unchecked, this could create an increased risk of burnout and a lack of work-life balance that may lead to the turnover of a top performer. The employee in this example should still be recognized for their hard work and performance. However, their manager may be wise to accompany this recognition with clarified expectations, additional support, timelines and resourcing to reinforce a more reasonable status quo that is supportive of wellbeing.

The wellbeing of employees is not just a personal matter but a pivotal factor that influences their presence and performance at work. Organizations that acknowledge the importance of wellbeing and create supportive and engaging work environments can positively impact their employees' experiences at work and enjoy increased productivity as a result.

However, wellbeing is complex and reflective of a wide range of factors and experiences. Alongside other best practices, organizations may leverage high-quality strategic recognition to boost employees' daily emotional experiences, promote work-life balance and foster holistically supportive cultures.

Methodology Statement

Primary results from this report are based on a survey conducted April 16-30, 2024, with 4,439 adults who are employed full or part time, aged 18 and older, and living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, as a part of the Gallup Panel™. For results based on these samples of national employed adults, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is ± 2.3 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and ± 1.4 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%.

Some results from this report are based on a survey conducted May 7-21, 2024, with 21,543 adults who are employed full or part time, aged 18 and older, and living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, as a part of the Gallup Panel. For results based on these samples of national employed adults, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is ± 0.9 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and ± 0.5 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%.