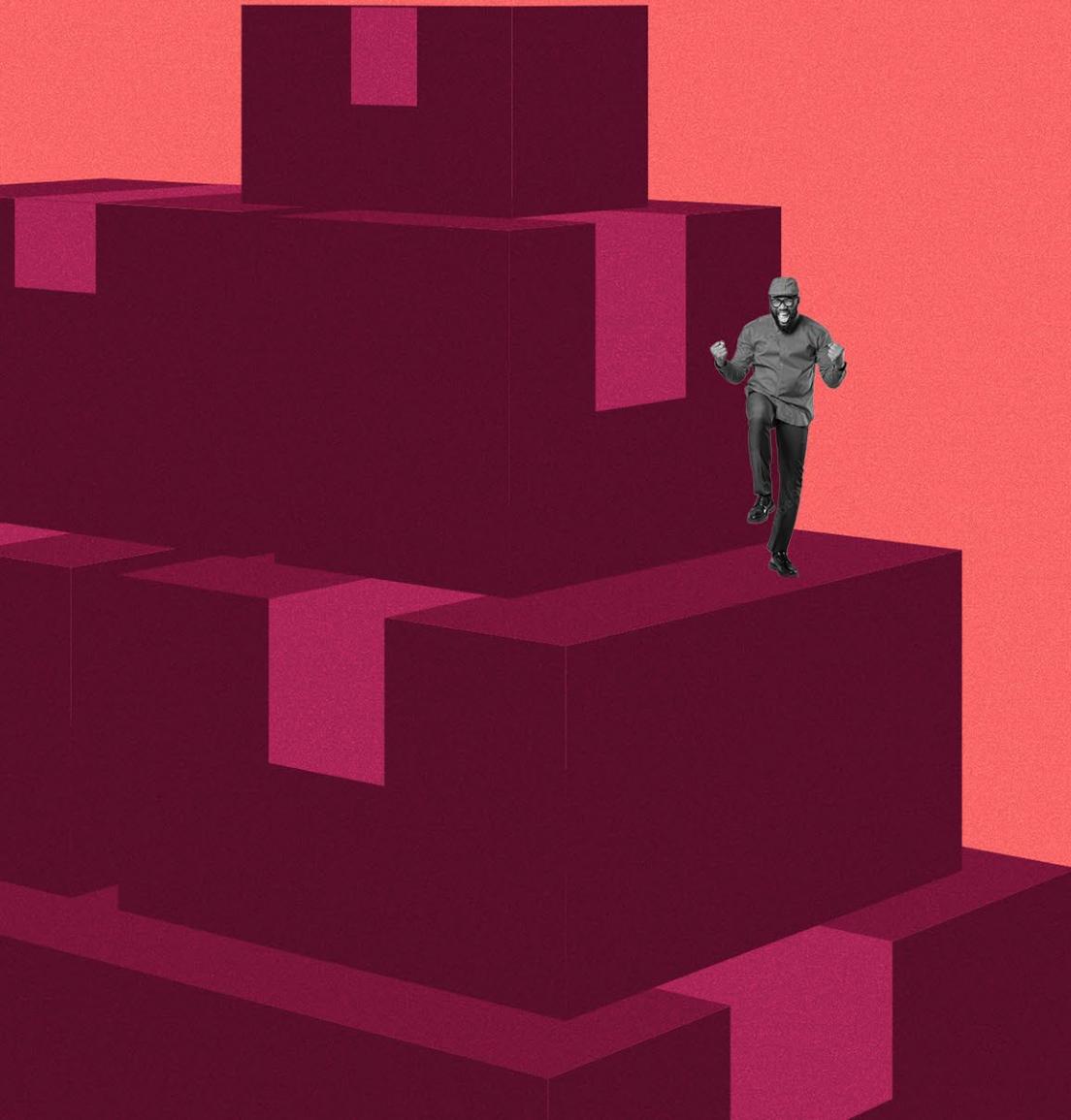


2025 WORKHUMAN GLOBAL  
RESEARCH STUDY: REWARDS

# The Tangible Value of Appreciation



workhuman\*



# Rewards give gratitude more measurable human and business impact.

For decades, our Workhuman research and customer results have shown a simple pattern: When people are recognized, they feel connected, do better work, and stay.

Building from that foundation, the 2025 Workhuman Global Research Study asks a practical question: What makes the rewards that come with recognition most meaningful, impactful, and measurable?

When looking at program design factors like reward frequency, value, and choice – as well as ease of redemption – our research revealed that they drive emotion, loyalty, and retention. These findings show that how people experience rewards from recognition is often as important as the recognition itself, and they demonstrate that impact-wise recognition and rewards are deeply intertwined.

## About the survey

Surveying more than 2,500 workers in the U.S., U.K., Ireland, Canada, and Australia, we found that **meaningful rewards share five dimensions: they're tangible, connected, memorable, universal, and personalized.** When rewards deliver across these dimensions, employees report stronger belonging and connection, higher engagement and advocacy, and clearer alignment to their company values and goals.

## Summary of findings

**19x**

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.**

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**7x**

Even a single reward redemption doubles love for a recognition program, and **11+ redemptions grow that positive feeling nearly 7x.**

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**2x**

Employees who love their recognition program are nearly **2x more likely to feel they belong** – and deliver stronger outcomes across every metric, from engagement and alignment to NPS.

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**34%**

Employees who redeem rewards frequently report **34% more belonging** and are significantly more likely to recognize others in return.

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**21%**

When rewards carry real monetary value, **engagement rises by 21%** and belonging by 28%.

In a hybrid, fast-moving world where connection is harder to see, tangible rewards create visible, lasting proof of belonging – and measurable impact on performance. Recognition shapes behavior and culture while tangible rewards are a multiplier that amplify the influence of appreciation.



# The five dimensions of meaningful rewards

Strategic recognition is a social signal: a meaningful thank you and a specific, peer-visible story about contribution.

A reward is the material expression that follows, that is intended to extend and underscore that appreciation.

They're intertwined, but not interchangeable – and how you design the reward will affect how the recognition lands. It's easy to love a gift, but not all gifts of appreciation create the same signal or the same results. The experience of a reward – what it's worth, how it's chosen, and how easy it is to redeem – matters almost as much as the reward itself.

In our study, five dimensions consistently separate ineffective reward experiences from ones that drives outcomes. They are:

- **Tangible**
- **Connected**
- **Memorable**
- **Universal**
- **Personalized**

# 1. Tangible

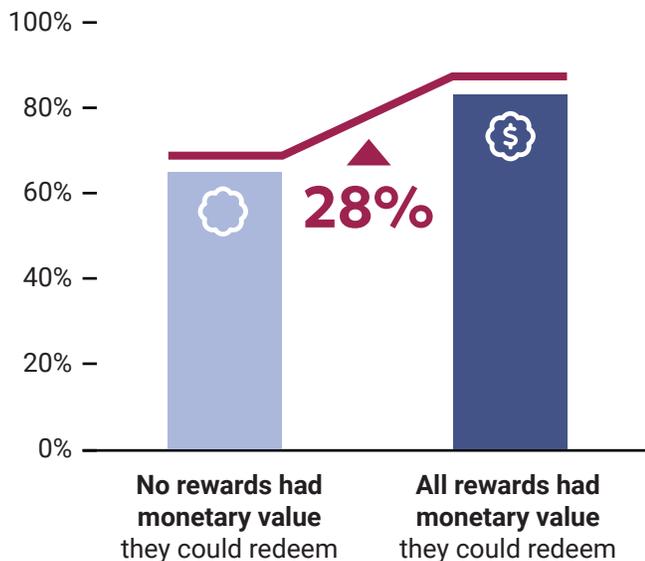
## Rewards with real value that reinforce worth

Tangible rewards – points or credits with clear, redeemable monetary value – make appreciation more credible. They convey to employees that a thank-you is backed by genuine investment, and they invite employees to turn that moment into something they can see, use, or experience to remember their contribution and connection over time.

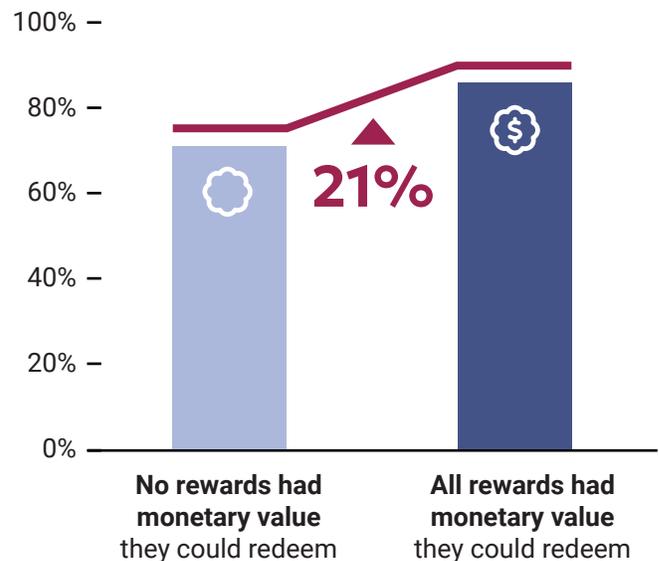
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### When rewards carry real monetary value, belonging and engagement rise.

Percent who agree:  
**I feel a strong sense of belonging at my organization.**



Percent who agree:  
**I feel motivated to do my best work every day.**



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## Very engaged employees spend reward points on things they wouldn't buy with their own cash.

# 25%

Employees who use rewards for splurges are 25% **more likely to feel motivated to perform** than those who use rewards for routine purchases.

# 95%

The vast majority (95%) of employees who used rewards for “splurge” items they wouldn't buy otherwise **say they're motivated to perform.**

It's clear in this data that recognition with eThanks alone will miss the mark. Tangible value signals fairness and substance.

The redemption experience opens the way for **purchases people feel**, which in turn deepens attachment to the program and colleagues, and **strengthens the cultural story around recognition.**

Workers were more likely to say they love their program when they have the opportunity to choose splurges or items they wouldn't otherwise buy with their own cash.

To make rewards as sticky and meaningful as possible, ensure they have some tangible value.

## 2. Connected

### Rewards that bring people together

Great rewards connect – not just to the recipient, but to others around them. A meaningful reward experience is one people can share with loved ones – and that in turn connects people more closely to their coworkers.

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**When rewards are linked to shared moments, they can extend the emotional impact of recognition and strengthen social bonds that drive collaboration.**

**70%**



redeemed points as a gift for someone else.

**56%**



redeem their points for something that benefits the wellbeing of their family or friends.



# 19%

Employees who redeem for the wellbeing of loved ones are **19% more likely to say they are motivated to perform** and **16% more likely to feel connected to colleagues at work.**



# 2x

Employees with a very positive reward experience are almost **2x as likely to say they feel connected to colleagues at work.**

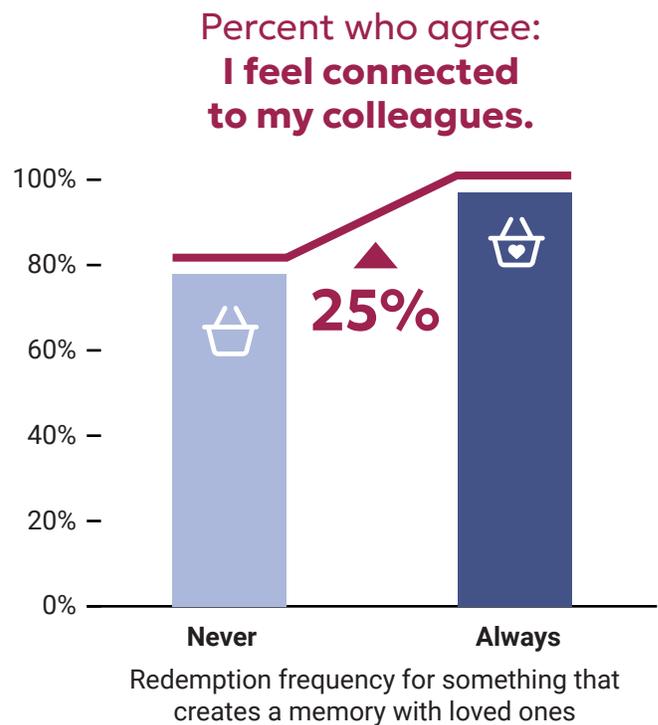
### 3. Memorable

## Stories that last and strengthen culture

Memorable rewards turn fleeting moments into stories that employees tell and retell – stories that reinforce belonging, pride, and shared culture. When employees redeem for something that creates a lasting memory, the recognition moment continues to live in the organization’s collective narrative.

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### Redeeming rewards for memories drives positive outcomes



These “story-worthy” redemptions transform a private transaction into a shared expression of culture.

When employees post photos, mention their purchases in team chats, or share stories about their rewards (such as the Reward Stories in Workhuman’s Culture Hub), they are able to **spark additional waves of good feeling, engagement, and organizational affinity.**

In this way, memorable rewards serve as culture compounding events – each story amplifying another, embedding gratitude deeper into the organizational fabric.

## 4. Universal

### Rewards that reach everyone without friction

Making rewards universally accessible has two aspects: reach and ease.

First, rewards should have **reach**: The program must include every employee in an equitable way (role, region, device, shift pattern) so more people can actually redeem and experience rewards.

Second, they should be **frictionless**: In other words, the experience of choosing and redeeming rewards should feel accessible and easy – simple, fast, and mobile-first.

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#### Participation predicts impact

**34%**



Employees who redeem **2-10+ times per year** show **34% higher belonging** than those who never redeem – proof that broad reach plus low effort turns gratitude into a habit.

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## What “frictionless” means in practice

44%



cite a simple, mobile-friendly process as the most enjoyable aspect of redemption

40%



want clear guidance on what their points can buy

The ability to filter/personalize options and see fresh items **keeps people coming back**, which expands reach over time through word-of-mouth and team norms.

Reward design is key. To be impactful, everyone should be able access your store (with coverage for offline, deskless, and global workers). Friction in the flow of your redemption process should be removed with features such as single-sign-on (SSO), native mobile, clear value cues, minimal steps, and strong, local post-redemption support.

Universality will determine whether recognition stays symbolic or becomes a lived part of everyday culture. Even the most generous reward loses power if it's hard to find, confusing to redeem, or unevenly distributed. A seamless, mobile-first redemption experience turns gratitude into action for everyone – not just the most visible or tech-savvy employees.



## What makes an enjoyable reward redemption experience?

**44%**

A simple, mobile-friendly redemption process

**40%**

Clear guidance on what my points or credits can buy

**31%**

A shopping experience similar to the best online stores

**21%**

Ability to filter or personalize options

**18%**

Seeing new and updated items regularly

**14%**

Occasional reminders that I have points to redeem

**12%**

Periodic sales or discounts

The ability to share how I used my award with colleagues

**12%**

The ability to use my credit card with my points to pay for an item

**9%**

A visual preview of the reward in real-time context

**12%**

**8%**

The ability to create a wishlist so I can save up for an item

**6%**

I don't think the redemption process matters that much

## 5. Personalized

### Relevant rewards that make employees feel seen

Choice is one of the clearest signals of respect. When employees can select rewards that fit their culture, lifestyle, or life stage, they see themselves reflected in the program – and in the organization that funds it. Personalization is what turns a generic gift into a meaningful one that lasts.

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**People love recognition programs with reward choices aligned to their personal culture, values, and interests.**



# 3x

Employees who say their reward options reflect their culture, values, and interests are **3x more likely to love their recognition program.**



# 1 in 5

say they find options that align with their **lifestyle or hobbies** most personally meaningful.

# 1 in 6

find rewards that align with their **personal values** most personally meaningful.

Employees who feel their program “fits them very well” are significantly more likely to report belonging, engagement, and advocacy for their organization.

A personalized catalog – by region, by season, by identity – **signals fairness and inclusion while enhancing emotional return on investment.**

From experience-based options to family-oriented gifts, personalization reminds employees that appreciation is not one-size-fits-all.

When people feel seen, they stay longer, perform better, and advocate for their workplace. Personalization is the dimension that ensures every reward, like every recognition moment, is as unique as the human who receives it.



## ★★★★★ What makes an enjoyable reward selection?

**39%**

Gift card options

**39%**

Value comparable to other online stores

**28%**

The ability to find whatever I am looking for

**26%**

Having options that reflect my culture or region

**23%**

Brand-name options

**22%**

Experience-based options

**19%**

Options that align with my lifestyle or hobbies

Options that align with my values

**17%**

**14%**

Charitable options

**10%**

Rewards branded with my company logo

**16%**

The ability to gift rewards to others

**4%**

I don't think rewards matter much



# The business case for rewards done right

When the five dimensions of meaningful rewards come together, the results can compound. Recognition becomes not just a cultural signal but a measurable driver of performance, retention, and ROI.

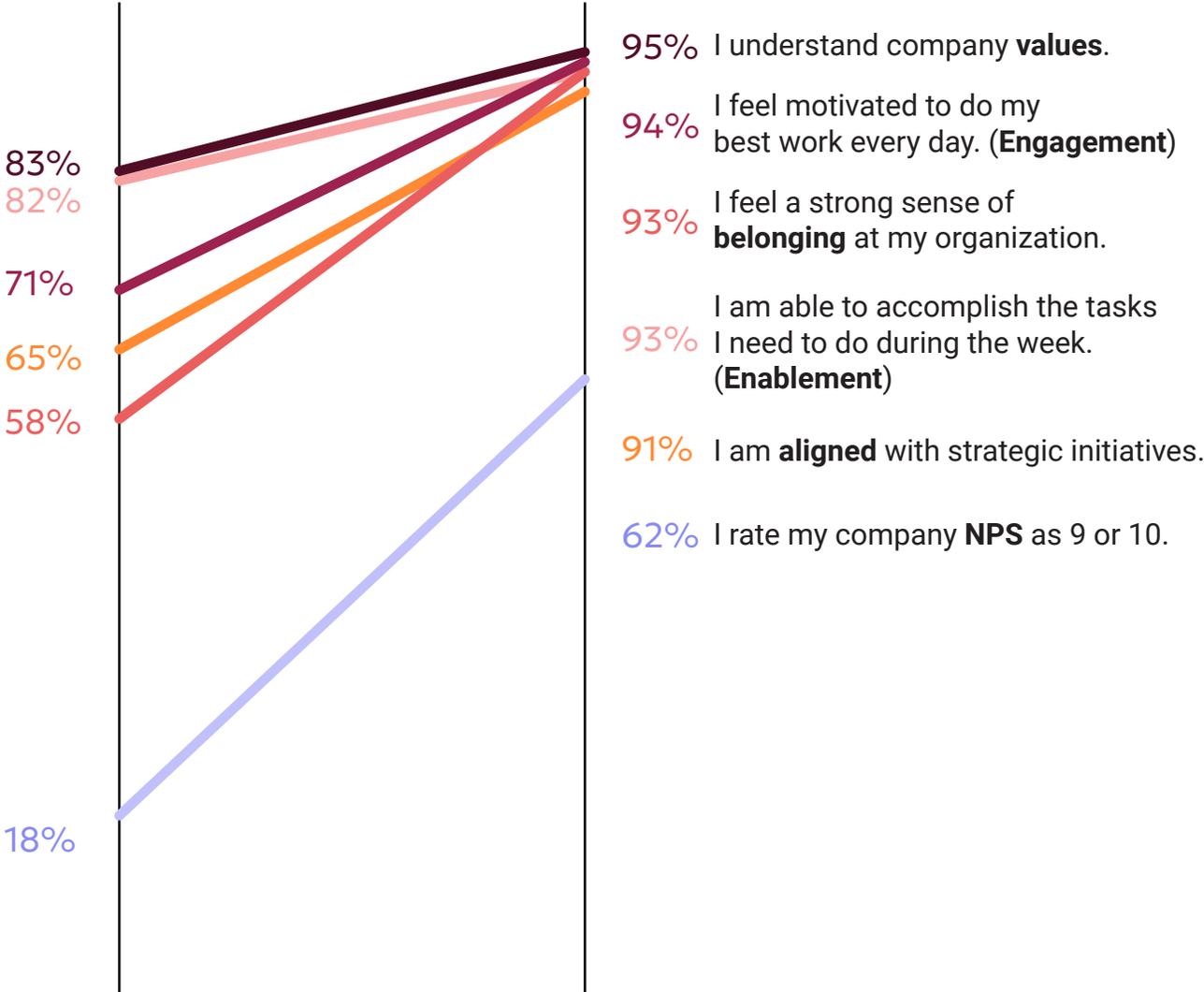
Across multiple factors (program likability, redemption frequency, and reward value), outcomes improve dramatically when employees report a positive reward

experience. Rewards that are designed and delivered well don't just make employees feel appreciated; they make recognition programs work better.

# When people like their recognition program, every outcome is higher.

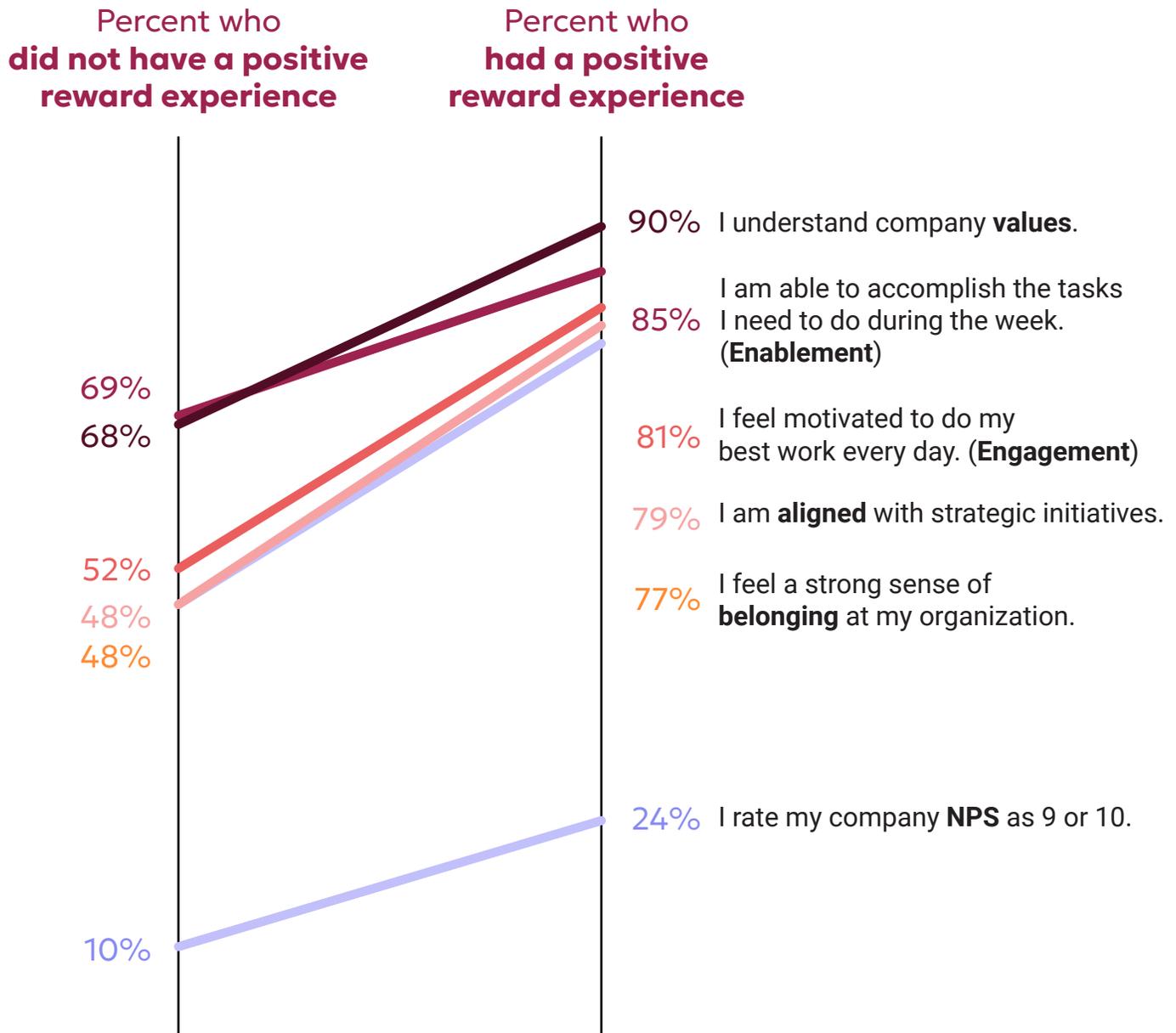
Percent who agree:  
**My recognition program is okay.**

Percent who agree:  
**I love my recognition program.**



While negative outcomes might be expected from people who dislike their recognition program, it turns out that outcomes for those who love their recognition program are also significantly higher than for those who are merely ambivalent.

## Satisfaction with the reward experience is even more predictive of outcomes.



The takeaway is clear: **The quality of a reward experience directly predicts business outcomes.** A great reward design creates a self-reinforcing loop where recognition fuels motivation, belonging fuels performance, and performance fuels advocacy.

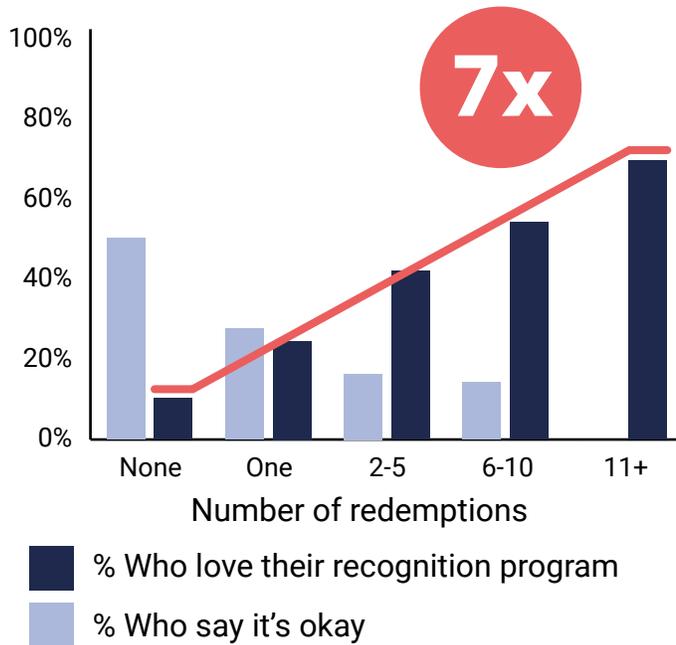


# How redemption helps make a recognition program “loved”

What are the criteria that separate a beloved program from a “meh” program?

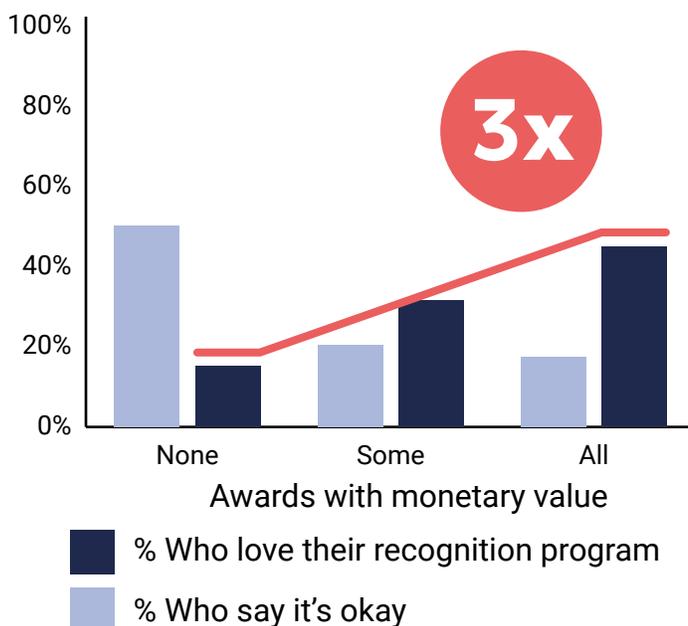
Employees don’t “just” love a recognition program. They love what it enables: credible value, frequent use, story-worthy outcomes, and a smooth experience. Design for those, and “love” will show up in the numbers.

## Frequent reward redemption equates with 7x program lovability



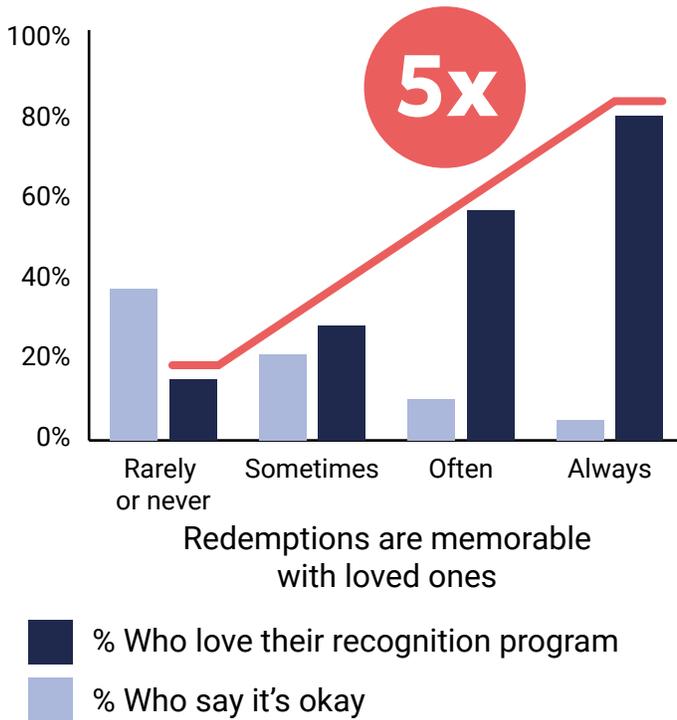
Frequency of award redemption makes all the difference between a loved program and one that's simply "okay." The more often employees are able to redeem rewards, the more they will like their recognition program. Chances people will love their program doubles with one redemption, quadruples with more than one, and grows nearly 7x with 11+ redemptions.

## Tangible value correlates with 3x increase in love for a recognition program.



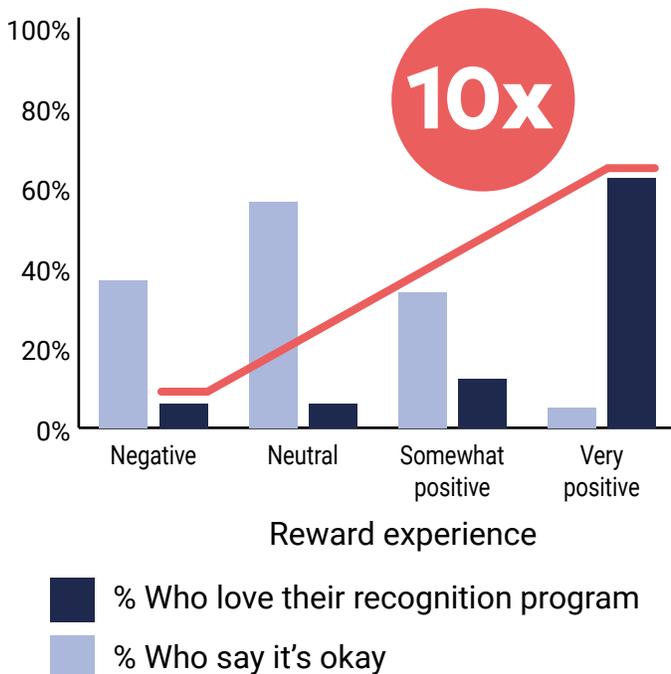
Rewards with tangible, monetary value lift a program from "meh" to marvelous. When rewards carry redeemable monetary value, love for the program nearly triples. Even if only some of the awards have tangible value, program lovability doubles.

## Memorable redemptions come with 5x love for a recognition program



An “okay” program becomes beloved when rewards are memorable. Employees who always redeem for rewards that create memories with loved ones are 5x more likely to say they love their program than those who never do.

## A positive rewards experience = a positive recognition experience



A positive rewards experience makes all the difference between an “okay” program and a “loved” program. 61% of those with a very positive reward experience say they also love their recognition program. If they feel negatively about rewards, only 6% love the program.



# The ROI of rewards: A deep dive into Workhuman iQ data

The survey results in this report were drawn from a random sample of respondents in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, and Ireland. But there are also deep insights to be had from looking closely at Workhuman recognition data, itself.

Across millions of moments in the Workhuman Cloud, every award and every redemption is a data point that reveals

how culture moves: who's engaging, where appreciation is thriving, and what drives results.

Here are just some of the impacts Workhuman iQ data has shown from our own customer rewards data.

## **Connection through rewards**

Employees who redeemed a reward in the past 12 months are **66% more likely to recognize a colleague.**

Redemption sparks a positive feedback loop that keeps appreciation active across teams.

## **Program satisfaction**

Net Promoter Scores (NPS) for recognition programs are **13% higher among employees who have redeemed rewards** within the last three months – clear proof that usage drives adoption and advocacy.

## **Recognition and reward data in action**

What makes our Workhuman iQ insights so powerful is that they come not from assumptions or general surveys, but from real behavior inside your organization.

Every recognition moment carries information – about skills, contribution, and collaboration – and every reward redemption amplifies it. With our Human Intelligence® insight layer and the support of our Workhuman iQ team, organizations can uncover these same insights in their own recognition data:

How do redemptions affect  
**recognition and nomination patterns?**

Where are reward stories impacting  
**connections across the organization?**

How are redemption patterns  
**predicting retention** or advocacy?

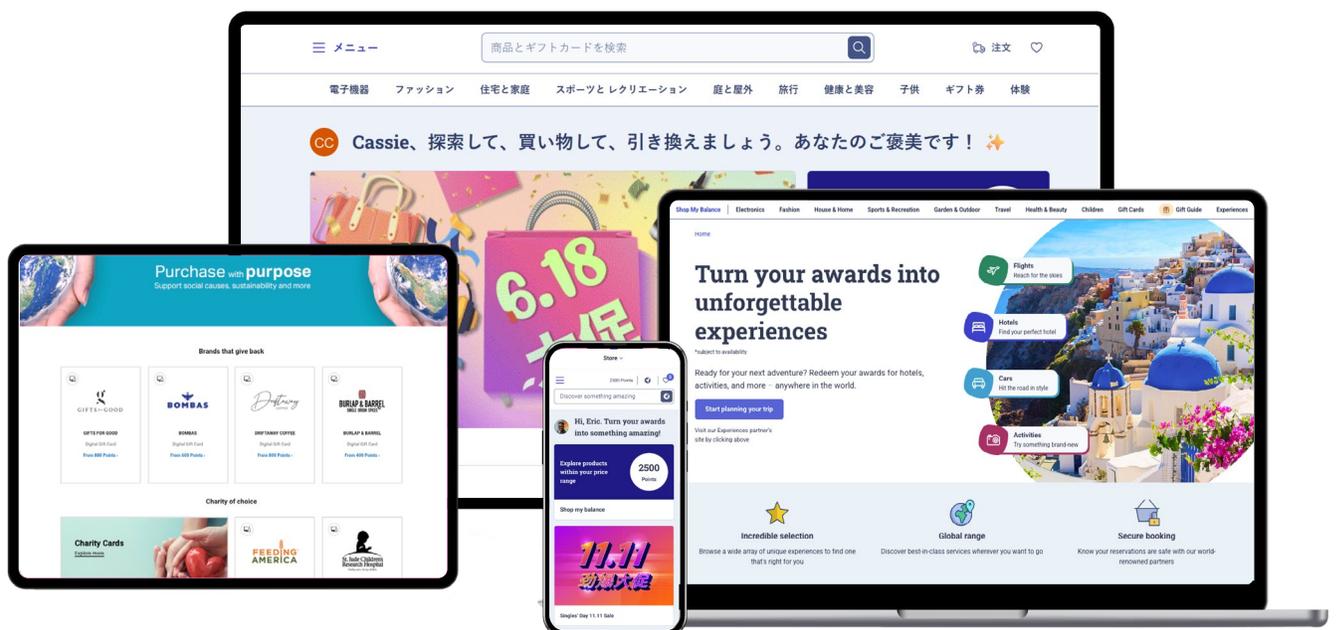
How are rewards **reinforcing our values**  
and strategic initiatives?

This is how you can measure the ROI of recognition-driven rewards.



# The Workhuman approach to rewards

Workhuman's rewards ecosystem brings all five dimensions of meaningful rewards to life – powered by our global Store, our Standard of Living Index (SOLI), Reward Stories, and Human Intelligence insights.



# How Workhuman delivers on the five dimensions of meaningful rewards

<b>Tangible</b>	Real monetary value calibrated for global fairness via our Standard of Living Index (SOLI) and fulfilled directly through the Workhuman Store in a way that puts them into employees' hands faster, with localized support and no friction
<b>Connected</b>	Rewards that tie back to the recognition moment through strategic reminders, amplified and visible to peers through Reward Stories
<b>Memorable</b>	Over a million choices including merchandise, gift cards, charitable giving, travel, and experiences – all expertly curated to create meaningful stories employees love to share
<b>Universal</b>	Rewards available via desktop and native mobile app across 150+ countries, with in-house local language support and local shipping for 95% of employees
<b>Personalized</b>	Country-specific catalogs with culturally relevant promotions and shopping collections, plus personalized product recommendations, wishlists, and more

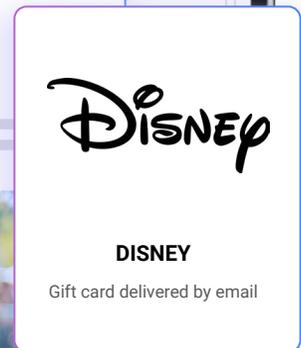
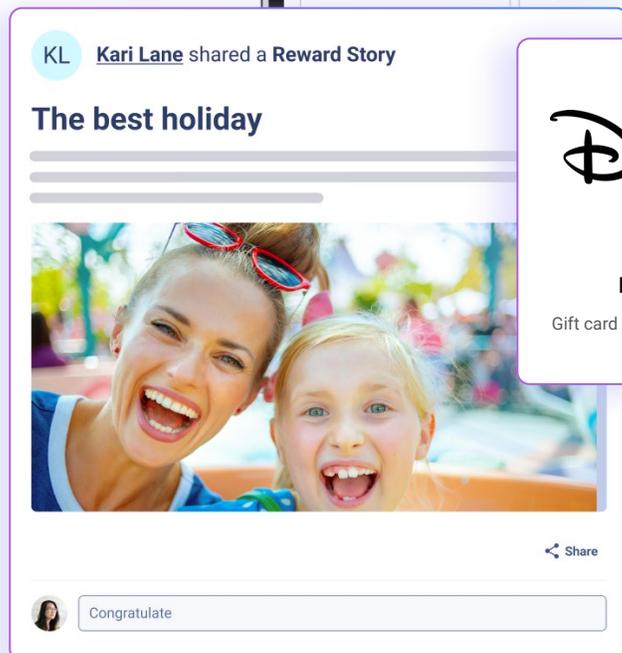
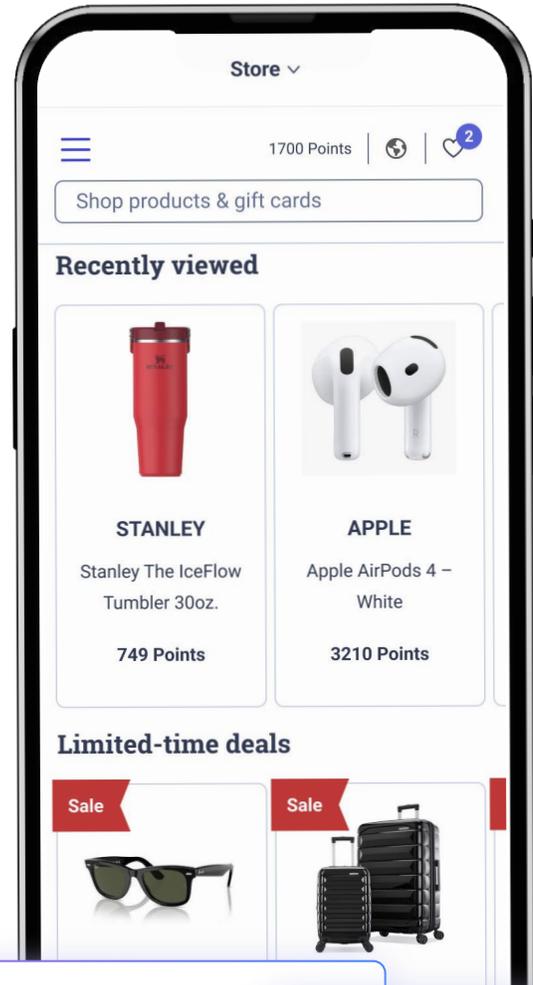
## Workhuman’s integrated rewards experience turns recognition theory into a daily practice.

Every redemption becomes both a moment of joy for employees and a Human Intelligence signal for leaders – revealing what people value most and how recognition is shaping culture across the organization.

Our native, mobile-first store earns NPS scores higher than leading consumer e-commerce brands. Employees can redeem instantly – buying a gift card in line at the store and using it at dinner minutes later.

And every reward is also a story. Through Reward Stories in the Culture Hub, employees share how they used their awards – creating moments that travel through teams, strengthen connection, and extend the cultural impact of recognition.

With over \$1B in annual redemptions, 1M+ reward options, and coverage in 150+ countries, the Workhuman Store is one of the largest global e-commerce platforms of its kind. Every campaign, promotion, and experience is tailored by region and by person – ensuring recognition feels fair, personal, and unforgettable everywhere it happens.





# From insight to action: Designing rewards that work

If recognition shapes behavior and affinity, rewards reinforce the moments that matter.

When those rewards are emotional, memorable, easy, personalized, and tangible, they don't just thank people – they help them see themselves in your culture.

Here are five actions suggested by the data in this survey to look for in a more human – and higher-performing – rewards ecosystem.

# Five steps to a better reward experience

## 1. Ensure rewards have tangible, monetary value.

When rewards carry redeemable value, belonging rises by 28% and engagement by 21%. Tangibility reinforces fairness and credibility. Maintain a **transparent link between points and real-world value**. Audit catalogs with Workhuman's SOLI index to ensure consistent, fair purchasing power globally.

## 2. Track and learn from redemption data.

Workhuman iQ data shows employees who redeem are 66% more likely to recognize a colleague themselves and 13% happier with their program. Use analytics to monitor redemption behavior, link it to engagement and turnover data, and **identify where your rewards program is driving connection and performance**.

## 3. Design for memory, not transaction.

Employees who redeem for experiences or family memories report higher belonging than those who don't. **Promote redemptions that create shareable stories** – travel, celebrations, or wellbeing experiences – and surface those stories in feeds or newsletters.

## 4. Build rewards that reflect real life.

Employees who say their reward options reflect their culture, lifestyle, or values are more than three times more likely to love their program. Ensure your recognition store has a **rewards catalog that includes culturally relevant, lifestyle-aligned, and experience-based options**. Use regional and demographic data to make personalization feel real.

## 5. Make reward experiences easier – and more frequent.

Employees who redeem rewards 2–10 times a year show 34% higher belonging than those who redeem only once or not at all. **Frequent redemptions normalize gratitude and reinforce connection**. Simplify redemption with mobile-first design, single sign-on, and clear guidance on what points buy.

The data is clear.

When rewards are tangible, memorable, universal, personalized, and connected, people can see themselves in their organizational culture, and leaders can see the impact in your data.

That combination is what turns appreciation into alignment, and alignment into measurable performance.

Get a live walkthrough of the Workhuman Store and rewards platform – tailored to your goals – and we'll show how to operationalize these five dimensions in your environment.

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