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6 Steps to Cultivate a People-First Culture





Employees today have little interest in companies that value profit over people. Instead, they are looking for organisations that wholeheartedly understand that **people are what make profit.**

Organisations that do understand this are starting to adjust their strategy accordingly toward a more people-first culture.

A people-first company culture is an approach that aims to support and recognise employees to help them feel more connected to the organisation and motivated to do their best work.

The result? Higher levels of job satisfaction among employees, lowered stress levels and improved wellbeing. The business sees benefits, too, primarily in increased productivity, employee engagement and improved employee retention.

Culture doesn't just inform how nice it is to work for your organisation; it also drives profitability and long-term success, especially when it comes to talent acquisition in today's job market, where employees still hold an advantage over employers.

There are few better ways to show your commitment to employees than by recognising them for their contributions to the workplace.

Companies that employ this business strategy reap the benefits; Workhuman® research found that Workhuman customers – who have created a more human workplace through Social Recognition® – saw an average increase of \$1,737 in increased productivity per employee versus companies without a recognition programme.

For a company with 15,000 employees, that translates into a \$26 million annual benefit compared to industry peers. Putting people at your company first isn't just the right thing to do – it's the business-savvy thing to do.

How to build a people-first culture

Changing your company's culture may feel daunting, but it doesn't have to.

All it takes to start is a mindset shift and the realisation that your business will do better if your employees feel better.

Here's how you can start incorporating these initiatives into your own HR strategy.

1. Align core values with business strategies

To get started, align all the business's goals with the company mission statement. If your goals don't currently mesh with company values, none of the people-first initiatives like recognition or pulse surveys put into place will make a difference. And if that's the case, it's time to reflect on either the company goals or the mission – maybe even both.

Once leaders understand how business objectives connect to the company mission, teach them about the importance of recognition and how it supports those key goals.

Keeping top talent, increasing productivity and maximising alignment should be the top goals of any successful company. Realising that recognition and employee-first strategies get you there is the first step toward a prosperous and long-term cultural shift.



2. Develop employee feedback opportunities

A people-first approach is all about prioritising employee wellbeing and the employee experience. For that, you need a firm grasp on what the employee experience is.

Offer meaningful and diverse opportunities for employee feedback. The way you accomplish this should be unique to your organisation's employees and needs.

Companywide surveys are a good starting point, and they can help you get an overall sense of the sentiments among employees, but that alone won't solve specific problems. After an initial survey, further engage with employees in meaningful ways and strive to understand their perspectives, such as through:

- Follow-up surveys (anonymous)
- Focus groups
- "Ask me anything" (AMA) meetings
- Open forums

These strategies can help you better direct your energy toward the solutions employees care about most.



3. Prioritise putting people first by recognising contributions

Recognition – from both peers and leaders – is a cornerstone of an employee-first strategy. It's also key to employees feeling seen and valued by their organisation.

Workhuman-Gallup research explains: “As a culture-building tactic, recognition creates a consistent source of positive regard. ... When employees – whether remote, hybrid or on-site – get the right amount of recognition, they feel more connected to their organisation’s culture.”

Each employee offers unique skills and ideas. Your praise for these contributions should be just as unique. This might mean private praise in some moments and public praise in others. You want it tailored to the employee.

Creating a new culture doesn't happen overnight. Incentives that go along with the recognition system are a great way to motivate people to engage with one another and the platform. After all, only when people participate in these initiatives can they be successful.



4. Communicate effectively to boost engagement

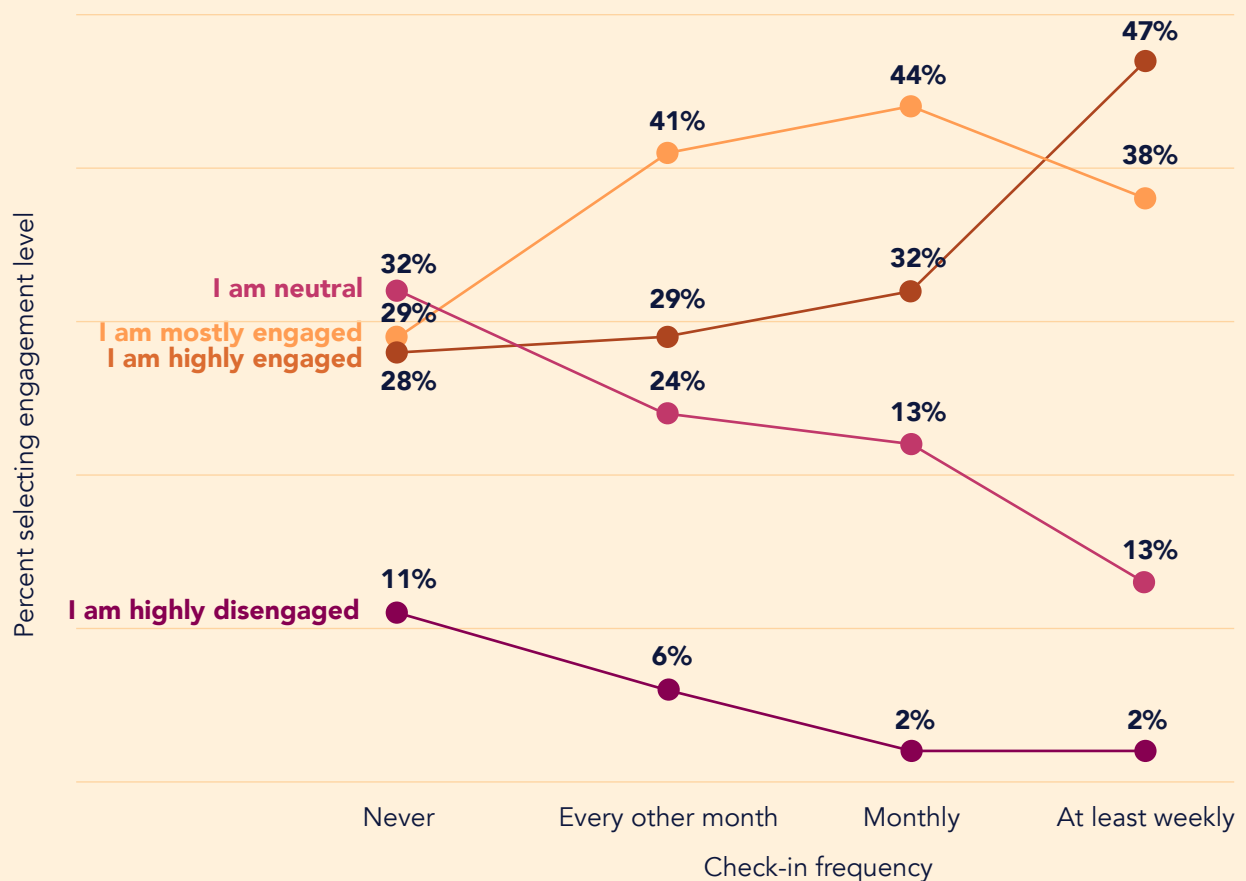
Empower employees to contribute their thoughts and ideas, no matter their job role, and give leaders the tools they need to support their teams. One of the most authentic ways to garner this relationship is through constructive and reciprocal check-ins.

When employees feel like their ideas matter and their feedback is taken seriously, they're more likely to offer it, boosting innovation and creativity within the organisation. Leaders can amplify this by meeting frequently with their reports to answer questions, assess problems and set goals.



As the graph shows, the more often an employee checks in with their manager, the more engaged they are likely to be. That engagement leads to better collaboration, better problem solving and an overall stronger relationship that is more likely to be built on trust and understanding.

More check-ins lead to more engagement.



5. Build trust into manager-employee relationships

When you give employees the autonomy to work on projects as they see fit rather than micro-managing them, you are showing them you trust their judgment and expertise.

This comes into play on a day-to-day basis, but also when planning bigger projects and setting longer term professional development goals. The best manager is one who prepares and guides their reports through new tasks, not the one constantly watching over their employee's shoulder.

A manager-employee relationship built with a foundation of trust and authenticity is essential to retaining employees and building a people-first culture. So, if employees share feedback or offer innovative solutions, take them with open arms and thank them.

One of the most important aspects of a people-first culture is including people in the decision making. And that's where trust comes in.



6. Embrace change with agility

Today, only one in four employees strongly agree that they feel connected to their company culture. Embracing change can help you shift the sentiment.

Employee-first culture is not one-size-fits-all, it's not an employee appreciation breakfast once a year and it's certainly not something to tack to the bottom of your core values list without following through.

Align your company toward a vision of employee fulfilment and success. Make their priorities your priorities. If your strategy is genuine, employees will feel cared about and they'll reciprocate. Loyalty is a two-way street, and actions speak louder than a core values poster in the break room.



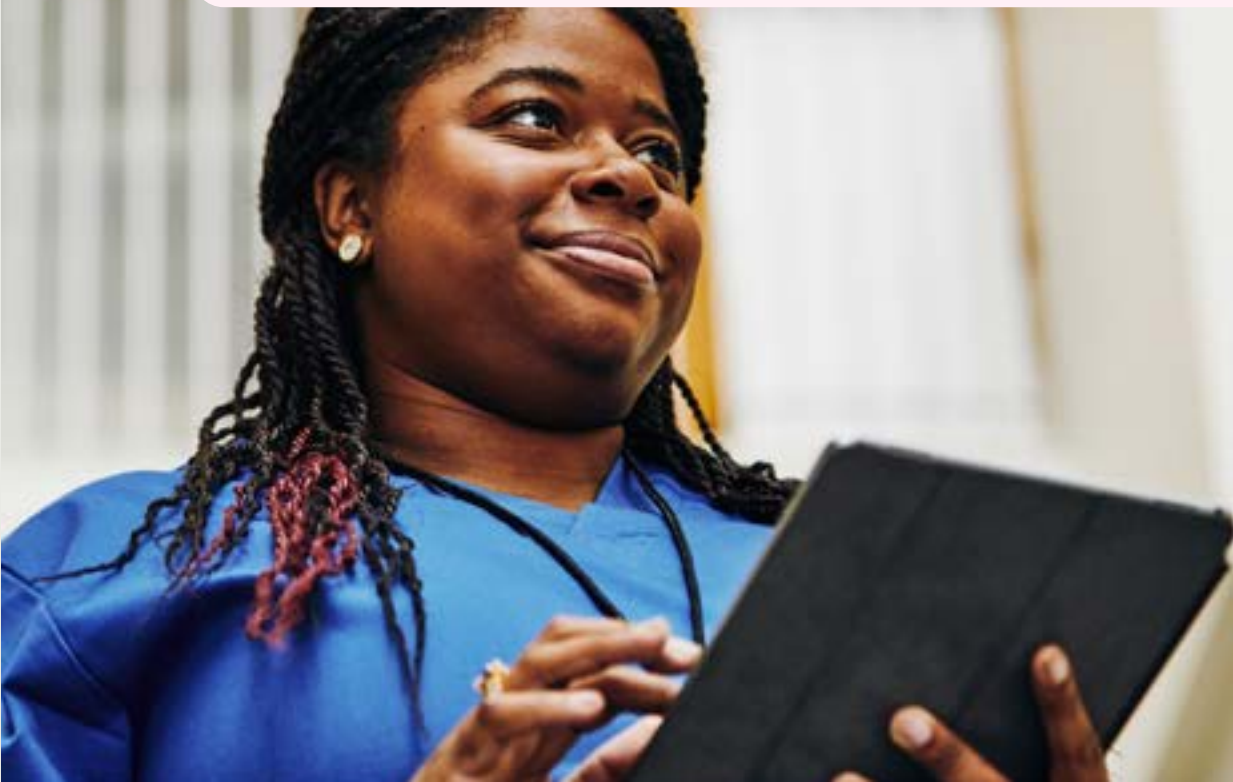
Customer spotlight – Baystate Health

When Baystate Health first set their sights on an employee-first culture, they knew appreciation would be a foundational aspect of their strategy. And based on employee feedback, they were right.

After only one year with a recognition programme, the results were clear – a human workplace was what employees wanted and needed. Among the results:

- **Employees produced 15,000 moments of recognition**
- **Of the company's 12,000 team members, 66% received recognition**
- **Recognised nurses were up to 7x less likely to leave**

Prioritising culture gives back in a way few other solutions can. Since Baystate Health has put its full attention on a people-first strategy, the results continue to be extraordinary.



Putting it into practice

When you put employees first, you create a work environment people are excited to be a part of.

They perform at a higher level with greater consistency and function better as a team because they feel they're doing meaningful work together. People care about the companies they work for when the companies they work for care about *them*.

With a people-first leadership strategy, a commitment to employee recognition and rewards and a culture rooted in feedback, employers can build a positive environment employees want to stay at for the long haul. The best part is you can start right now!

Discover how the Workhuman Cloud® can transform your culture into one that puts employees first – and the return on investment that comes with it.

Learn more today.

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