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workhuman*

Elevating Cultures of Feedback Through Recognition



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Providing feedback is one of the most important habits a manager can have, and receiving high-quality feedback has a strong positive correlation with engagement on other key measures of the employee experience. However, research from Gallup and Workhuman finds that 46% of all employees do not get feedback from their manager at the rate they want. Furthermore, just 25% of employees strongly agree they receive valuable feedback from the people they work with. Many employees may hold negative perceptions about feedback not because they are fundamentally opposed to input about their performance, but because the feedback they are currently receiving is not productive or valuable to them.

If managers and leaders want their feedback to be acted upon, they must deliver it effectively. Organizations must seize the opportunity to redefine what feedback means to their employees by demonstrating that intentional, meaningful feedback can provide them with real value. When it does, employees turn this value back around. Employees who strongly agree they get valuable feedback about their performance from the people they work with are 5.0 times as likely to be engaged.

Gallup and Workhuman find that, by combining high-quality feedback with strategic recognition, organizations can build balanced cultures of feedback where employees freely share input and praise with others no matter their role or position. Blending recognition and feedback helps employees feel supported and valued, while also transmitting critical information that establishes the behaviors an organization needs from its employees to be successful.

Forward-thinking companies will foster a workplace that encourages not just leaders and managers but all employees to provide feedback and recognition to their peers. The following defines what makes feedback meaningful, explores how it benefits individuals and teams, and reviews how recognition and feedback can work in combination to develop healthy cultures of feedback.



Defining Meaningful Feedback

Gallup research finds that meaningful feedback is feedback that helps employees learn, grow and do their jobs better. Often, meaningful feedback conversations focus on collaboration, strengths, goal setting and recognition.

When delivered the right way, feedback has a transformational effect on employee experiences. A recent Gallup study showed that 80% of employees who say they have received meaningful feedback in the past week are fully engaged, regardless of whether they are working in the office or on-site, hybrid or remotely.¹

Providing quality feedback does not have to be cumbersome or overly complicated. A quick connection to reflect can happen casually and candidly. Managers who provide effective feedback do it in a way that is frequent, focused and future oriented.² These managers approach giving feedback as a vital coaching tool to refine and inspire employee performance, not as a box to check or a scare tactic.

Creating Synergy With Feedback and Recognition

Recognition is a form of feedback in and of itself that can help communicate expectations and positively reinforce the behaviors that drive an organization forward.

When an employee demonstrates positive behaviors like mentoring a new colleague, taking the initiative to improve an existing process or achieving one of their goals, recognition serves as feedback that encourages them to engage in similar behaviors in the future. Simultaneously, recognition uplifts an employee to approach their work with more energy and enthusiasm. When recognition and other forms of feedback are delivered with specificity, these positive effects are amplified. Sharing broad praise such as “great work on that presentation last week!” is distinctly less actionable and meaningful than more tailored feedback such as “the extra time you spent designing that presentation made the information much more understandable and impressed the client!”

Frequently providing recognition can help managers alleviate or even fully eliminate tensions in challenging moments when they must deliver more critical, negative feedback to an employee. When check-ins are normalized, they are less likely to feel like a moment of extreme consequence for both parties. Conversely, if a manager fails to develop a healthy relationship with an employee or does not commonly provide them with high-quality recognition when deserved, the employee is likely to receive negative feedback in a way that is less productive.

Ultimately, there is no such thing as too much feedback or recognition if delivered in a meaningful, authentic and fair way. With that said, when either is delivered carelessly or just to check off a list, it can have the opposite effect. Employees who receive recognition or feedback that is not reflective of their actual behaviors or accomplishments can be left feeling misunderstood or unseen.

1 Harter, J. (2023, May 30). A great manager's most important habit. *Gallup.com*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/505370/great-manager-important-habit.aspx>

2 McLain, D. & Nelson, B. (2022, January 1). How effective feedback fuels performance. *Gallup.com*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357764/fast-feedback-fuels-performance.aspx>

Leveraging Peer-to-Peer Feedback and Recognition

In most organizations, employees are likely to receive feedback from their managers, even if it is just once a year during performance reviews. Feedback between peers is less often formally facilitated. However, data shows that *recognition* already happens more often from peer to peer than from manager or leader to employee. Forty-six percent of employees say they receive recognition from a peer at least a few times a month, while 38% say they receive recognition from a manager in their organization that often.

Many organizations could stand to benefit from encouraging employees to intentionally focus and refine their existing recognition practices to provide valuable feedback to their peers. Through recognition, employees can provide affirmation to their peers when they communicate, perform a task or share a deliverable in a way that aligns with their own preferences and workstyle. When individuals on a team leverage recognition to communicate their own needs, they enjoy closer bonds and collaborate with higher efficiency.

Gallup and Workhuman research confirms that, when the culture of an organization or team enables employees to share feedback with one another in a way that is safe and productive, they are likely to have vastly improved experiences in their workplace.

Employees who strongly agree they get valuable feedback about their performance from the people they work with are:

57%

LESS LIKELY
to be burned out

48%

LESS LIKELY
to be looking or watching for another job

Elevating Feedback and Recognition Through Personalization

Gallup and Workhuman research finds that all employees – both managers and individual contributors – are ill-equipped to deliver personalized recognition. Just 13% of all employees strongly agree they know how others at work like to be recognized.

If all employees in an organization became even better prepared to deliver feedback and recognition to peers, the impact could be drastic. Employees who strongly agree that they know how the people they work with like to be recognized are 2.6 times as likely to strongly agree that they have meaningful connections with their coworkers and 2.9 times as likely to strongly agree that they feel connected to their organization's culture. These results underscore how closer employee relationships set the foundation for better recognition and feedback experiences and stronger workplace cultures.

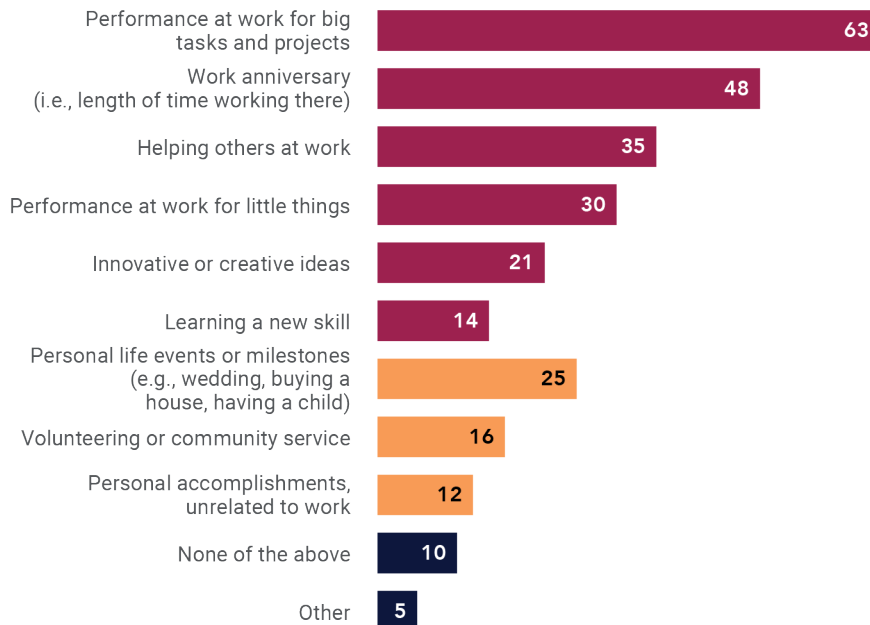
Each person has unique preferences for how they like to be recognized, but also what they like to be recognized for. In the latest Gallup-Workhuman survey, employees identified the most common reasons people receive recognition at their organization.

Most Common Recognition Reasons

What are the most common reasons why employees at your organization are recognized, thanked or appreciated?

% Endorsed

■ Reasons related to work ■ Reasons not related to work ■ Other responses



These data show that most organizations do not expand the list of reasons employees are recognized beyond performance for big tasks and projects and work anniversaries. Only 37% of employees say that non-work-related reasons for recognition are among the most common reasons people receive recognition in their workplace. Recognizing productivity and performance is imperative but should not be the only reason people are valued at work. People in an organization should feel empowered to recognize, appreciate and express gratitude for their colleagues for who they are in addition to what they do in their job.

A comparison of respondents who say they receive recognition for non-work-related reasons and those who do not suggests that having a wider range of reasons for which people are recognized corresponds with having a more robust and better-connected culture. When non-work-related reasons are commonly recognized in the workplace, employees are 67% more likely to be engaged and 74% more likely to strongly agree they are connected to their organization's culture.

There is a great opportunity for managers and leaders to redefine what feedback looks and feels like within their organizations. When feedback is specific, productive and meaningful, it corresponds with improved employee experiences and elevated productivity. When all employees across an organization give intentional and personalized feedback and recognition to their peers, dynamic cultures of feedback develop and amplify the benefits even further.

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%.