



# Employee Engagement Strategy Guide

*Your Roadmap for Culture Improvement and Change*





*Organizations that have happy, engaged employees and a strong, focused culture perform better.*

## Guide Overview

Today, employee engagement is a critical component of any organization's strategic plan. HR professionals and organizational leaders across all industries are challenged with creating a culture that drives results through engagement, shared values, and performance-centered recognition.

### But how is this done?

This guide breaks down how to get started on an employee engagement and culture-building plan, then dives into four key components of employee engagement:

1. Employee Recognition
2. Workplace Culture
3. Living by Your Corporate Values
4. Communication in Today's Distributed Workforce

An engaged and high-performing workforce is within your grasp – you just need the right approach and the best tools to foster the right culture to make it happen.

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# How To Build Your Employee Engagement & Culture Checklist: 4 Must-Haves



Evaluating and building employee engagement and culture can be a complex project to tackle. Why not start with jotting down some ideas in a simple checklist? Here are four must-haves for your list to get you started:

## **To-Do #1: Revisit, Communicate and Celebrate Your Values**

Do you know your organizational values? Are they well-known across your organization? Values are important, but unfortunately, people often dismiss them as corporate mumbo-jumbo without any real purpose. [According to Gallup](#), only 23% of employees strongly agree that they can apply their organization's values to their work every day and, just 27% of employees believe in their company's values. How do we fix this? Connect and communicate your corporate values and reinforce them daily - they are the foundation of your ideal workplace culture.

Any time organizations experience massive change, like what many went through in 2020 and 2021, revisiting organizational values is vital. Why? Strong values help your employees guide their work and daily decisions. For example, if you emphasize and promote customer experience as an important value, your employees will know that customer needs will always take precedence when juggling many priorities. Alternatively, emphasizing teamwork will remind your employees to collaborate and make themselves available to help across all departments.

**Where to start? Take stock of your current values – do you they still resonate?**

**Advanced action: Use your values as benchmarks for employee performance, and frequently recognize those who incorporate them into their daily work.**

### **To-Do #2: Communicate Intentionally**

Effective communication within your organization is critical, especially with remote workforces. [According to Forbes](#), the average attention span of a millennial is 12 seconds, for Gen Z workers, eight seconds; that 6-paragraph email isn't likely to get your message across effectively for those groups. Discovering the right channel to reach your departments or teams is the first step.

Managers should continuously be communicating to employees how and why their work affects organizational success. [Gallup reports](#) that many remote workers are likely to feel lost and/or forgotten in their new work environment. Voicing what an employee's contribution means to others can make them feel empowered, connected, and more engaged.

Another thing to explore is how personal milestones and life events can be communicated and celebrated remotely. Consider sharing employee birthdays, work-anniversaries, years of service milestones, and exciting life events, so everyone feels included and seen. Better yet, consider a system that does it automatically, like [Kudos](#) to avoid leaving anyone out.

**Where to start? Talk to your managers and team leads about their teams' communication preferences.**

**Advanced action: Implement focused tools that facilitate communication at the department and organization-wide level to create visibility, consistency and reach.**

### **To-Do #3: Dig into Your Culture**

What's the expression? Culture eats strategy for breakfast? [Studies show](#) that employees with a strong connection to their organization's culture exhibit higher levels of engagement. Unlike values, vision, or strategy, culture doesn't only come from the top-down. Employees and middle managers significantly impact what your corporate culture looks like. One practical example: consider whether or not you turn your camera on in virtual meetings. Is it only on with certain people or groups? That is part of your culture!

Small choices that managers make, like saying good morning every day, or allowing for a flexible work schedule, set the tone for the culture an individual employee will experience. [According to Gallup](#), managers account for 70% of the variance in employee engagement and directly affect how employees experience workplace culture. Your managers need to know your cultural expectations if you want your employees to have the right experience. Showing regular appreciation for small and major accomplishments to positive behaviours is a great way to for managers to engage their team.

*“Connect and communicate your corporate values and reinforce them daily – they are the foundation of your ideal workplace culture.”*

Culture can be a tough egg to crack, but being aware of the good, the bad, and the ugly of your organization's existing culture equips you with the knowledge you need to mitigate unfavourable situations and hire the right people.

**Where to start? Define and uncover your current organizational culture by interviewing employees at all levels. Start making a plan for what you would like it to look like.**

**Advanced action: Take your culture beyond the employee handbook by incorporating it into policies and practices. Recognize employees who live your organization's values.**

#### **To-Do #4: Recognize Your Employees Regularly**

Recognition is vital to fostering employee engagement. Today's employees need to hear that they're doing a great job. A strong recognition culture can also improve individual and overall business performance. [A recent survey](#) found that companies with the highest engagement levels see employee recognition as a means to develop and stretch employees to new levels of success. [Harvard Business Review has reported](#) that 40% of employed Americans say they'd put more energy into their work if they received recognition more often.

Be careful not to confuse rewards with recognition. When employees say they want more recognition for their hard work, they don't mean rewards. A reward would be a cash bonus or other gift with a monetary value; recognition is the act of appreciating and acknowledging your employees' great work and effort. It doesn't have to be complicated, [85% of employees](#) simply want to hear 'thank you' in their work interactions.

**Where to start? Take stock of your current recognition strategy. Are you relying too heavily on rewards? Assess the impact your approach has on employee engagement, culture, and business performance.**

**Advanced action: Establish a modern recognition strategy by [implementing a platform](#) that simplifies and normalizes frequent recognition in your organization and helps you track who is being recognized or recognizing most often.**

And that's it! With those four important to-dos' officially on your Employee Engagement and Culture Checklist, you're ready to get to work. In the next few sections, we'll be digging a bit deeper into these four to-dos to help you really make an impact.

*“Showing regular appreciation for small and major accomplishments to positive behaviours is a great way to for managers to engage their team.”*

# Employee Recognition 101: When, Why & How



Employee recognition is a continuously evolving space that has come a long way. Back when most employees spent their entire careers working for one company, pre-defined years of service awards and annual bonuses seemed to meet employees' recognition needs. But today, employee expectations have changed, and the organizations that want to remain successful are actively working to address these new expectations.

In today's HR departments, you'll find culture specialists, total rewards managers, employee experience architects, and even [chief happiness officers](#) all dedicated to improving employee experience. What's more, today's c-suite is discussing employer brand, employee engagement, and stakeholder capitalism regularly.

Employee recognition is an essential piece of today's HR puzzle - especially if your employees have recently reported a desire for more or better recognition in a survey or if you are experiencing high levels of turnover, poor performance, and employee burnout. Here's a simple overview to help you get to know the recognition space today and how you can make your employees and colleagues feel proud of their contributions at work.

## Why Is Recognition Important?

Recognition is vital to today's workforce. [Recent data collected by Gallup](#) found that praising and recognizing employees can positively affect employee well-being and your organization's bottom line. The report found that 66% of respondents trusted their colleagues more when they felt sufficiently praised. Adequately praised employees also produced better results and were more productive. [A study on the importance of recognition](#) found that today's most progressive organizations use their recognition programs to consistently reinforce key behaviors and outcomes necessary to drive business success.

[According to Forbes](#), recognized employees are "more satisfied, perform better, are more productive, and they're more likely to engage with the rest of the team." The Forbes piece explained that acknowledging employees for individual contributions reduces stress, absenteeism, and attrition. The previously quoted Gallup study found that employees who receive recognition also demonstrate increased collaboration through reduced self-protecting behaviors, such as information hoarding.

[Deloitte has identified](#) these five market factors that make recognition especially important and relevant today:

- 1. Unstable economy:** recognition is typically more cost-effective and has a longer-term impact than expensive salary increases and bonuses.
- 2. Need for greater agility:** through recognition, organizations can retain employees and attract top talent.
- 3. Flattening organizational cultures:** recognition serves as appreciation for strong performance when promotions aren't possible or the norm.
- 4. Technology:** Technology facilitates transparency, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, and that has become the expectation for today's employees. Organizational recognition programs should fit that mold.
- 5. Millennial Workforce:** Millennials are the largest generation in the workforce, and they expect and demand more feedback than previous generations.

[The ROI of recognition and employee engagement runs deep](#), but one of the most noticeable benefits to organizational culture and the bottom line is improved employee retention.

Employees who feel that they're not adequately recognized at work are 3x more likely to quit in the next year, [according to Gallup](#). [Deloitte also reported](#) that companies with cultures of recognition have 31 percent lower voluntary turnover. Another Deloitte report ([The Talent 2020 Survey](#)) found that recognition is among the top three most effective non-financial factors for retention.

*“What we see at Kudos is that a good frequency and quantity of recognition, when all team members are sending between 3 to 5 messages per person per month, creates a culture of appreciation that leads to higher engagement.”*



## When is Recognition Appropriate?

The timing of recognition matters. For recognition to appear authentic, it should be shared as close to the event or activity being recognized as possible, which means recognition should be given frequently. [According to Gallup](#), fewer than a third of workers have received praise from a supervisor in the last seven days. In fact, [Gallup's Chief Scientist Jim Carter](#) has stated, "Recognition is a short-term need that has to be satisfied on an ongoing basis - weekly, maybe daily."

In organizations with cultures of recognition, significant accomplishments and small favors are recognized often and freely. Praise and gratitude are both critical components of recognition and should be shared equally. Beyond that, inclusivity is key. Everyone's contributions, regardless of their role, should be acknowledged if the impact is meaningful; this fosters belonging and improved employee morale.

Both individuals and groups should be recognized to maximize the benefits. [When interviewed by Gallup](#), David Grazian, the Director of Corporate Taxation at Granite Construction, Inc., shared that publicly recognizing entire departments can improve the department's reputation within the organization while also helping you "get more resources" when you need them.

Finally, recognition doesn't just need to come from the top-down, i.e., manager-to-employee; recognition should flow to-and-from employees at all levels, which is what's known as peer-to-peer recognition. In fact, in some cases, the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) found that employees prefer to be recognized by their peers over their managers or superiors because their recognition feels more genuine.

*“At Kudos, we have found that while group recognition is important, one-to-one recognition has more impact on affecting an individual's performance, sense of belonging, and engagement.”*

## How to Give Meaningful Recognition

How you deliver your recognition can make a difference in the impact it will have.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- 1. Be specific:** Avoid dropping a generic, "Great job!" Instead, focus on what specifically the person did to earn the recognition and, when possible, how it advanced the individual or team towards a goal, and or demonstrated how to live a core value, and or advanced a company goal.
- 2. Be transparent:** If someone contributed to a team effort, make sure you specify exactly what they did in order to give them the credit they deserve. Also, include why you are recognizing an individual to show your sincerity.
- 3. Recognize the effort, not the outcome:** The goal of sending recognition is to encourage and reinforce positive behavior in your organization. By recognizing the work and thought that went into an accomplishment, you are not only providing meaningful recognition to the individual but also signaling to the broader organization what type of effort gets recognized.
- 4. Make it meaningful:** Recognize when it truly is warranted, using the two points above as a guide (specificity and transparency.) [Gallup explains](#) that "if everyone wins, no one wins" and that a recognition approach where everyone gets a turn regardless of the quality of their work can breed "resentment and, ultimately, cynicism."
- 5. Organizational values and mission:** Tying recognition back to organization's goals can make an employee feel like their contributions matter to the organization's success. In fact, [Human Resources Today's](#) definition of Employee Recognition mentions this exact point "Employee Recognition is nothing but the acknowledgment of an individual or team for their hard work, efforts, and accomplishments that go with the organization's goals and values."

Here are some templates to help you get started:

*"Your contribution to [project] was amazing!  
Your work on the [contribution] will help us to achieve our goal of [goal].  
You demonstrated fantastic [value 1] & [value 2]. Great work!"*

*"Great job on the [project/report/presentation]!  
Because of your hard work we were able to [goal/will/progress]. I'm always so impressed by  
your [value 1] and [value 2]. [Company name] wouldn't be the same without you."*

Finally, It's all in the delivery. To enjoy all the benefits of recognition discussed above, like increased productivity, employee engagement, and reduced turnover, the delivery method must be effective. Luckily, as employee expectations have changed, so has technology. Where recognition used to be more at the individual manager's discretion and generally hidden from the rest of the company, organizations who want to build a culture of recognition have implemented employee recognition platforms to streamline the process and create more transparency and accountability surrounding who is receiving recognition and how often. The recognition platform leaders provide a system that facilitates peer-to-peer recognition driven by values and visible to the entire organization – and robust analytics to track and measure success.

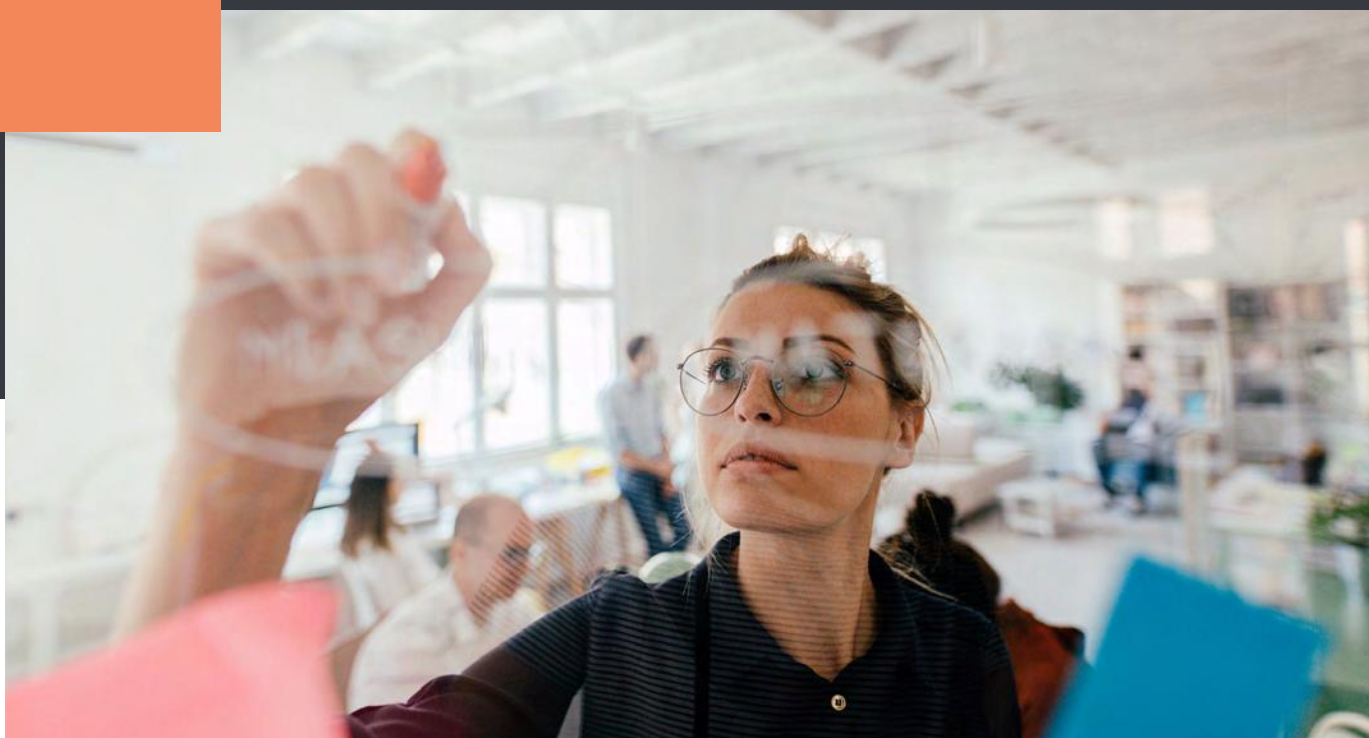
**Points are not the point.** Today, recognition is often confused with rewards, specifically points that employees can use toward gift cards or other perks. While rewards are a fantastic tool to reinforce performance and contribution, they are not interchangeable with recognition and certainly don't have the same long-lasting impact on employee engagement.

[In a Gallup study](#), money or financial reward ranked fifth as the most memorable form of recognition, after public and private praise, positive reviews, and added responsibilities. Simply put, if points are the central element of a recognition moment, that is a reward program, not a recognition program.

Recognition is a critical component of any organization's human resources strategy. The ROI of recognition is undeniable. With hybrid workforces as the new normal, having a plan for employee engagement regardless of geography should be top of mind for every c-suite. If it isn't, we challenge you to add it to your next management team meeting agenda to start the conversation.

*“Points are not the point.”*

# Reassessing, Refocusing & Reinforcing Culture



## How would you describe your organizational culture these days?

Ignoring significant shifts in organizational culture can be costly. The right culture can help employees fulfill their need for meaning and purpose at work, leading to more impactful discretionary effort and higher performance levels. Building on that, culture is a known powerful driver of employee engagement and [better financial performance for organizations](#).

Let's dig a bit deeper into the idea of culture. The most common definition speaks to a particular groups' shared values, goals, attitudes, and practices. As HR professionals and business leaders, it's important to remember that those values, goals, attitudes, and practices must be intentionally defined, shared, lived by leadership, and recognized widely and often to build the right culture.

Today, successful organizations are regularly reassessing, refocusing, and reinforcing their culture. In considering the steps below, you'll be well on your way to seeing a more engaged and higher-performing workforce.

## Reassessing Culture

Do you suspect there's an issue with the culture in your organization? Do you have a good pulse of your employee experience over the last year?

Many workplaces now have a hybrid workforce, combining in-office and remote workers. So, what does that mean for culture? Simply speaking, if you thought your office environment with a ping pong table and popcorn machine was the backbone of your culture, you were wrong. One thing that we've learned in the last year is that organizational culture is about relationships, not things, and it now needs to evolve based on what employees are experiencing day-to-day. For that to happen, leaders need to take the time to assess what's working and what needs a bit more attention.

Forbes offers [a simple 8 question model](#) to assess culture, with questions like "What was the biggest adjustment for you when you started working here?" and "How are meetings typically run here?". It's also important to ask questions about what has changed in the last year and what challenges employees are experiencing. That is important to understand because, according to Gallup, [managers account for 70% of the variance in employee engagement](#) and directly affect how employees experience workplace culture.

Today, it's essential to consider your findings based on the employees' individual workplace (in-office, remote, and hybrid.) Ideally, your organization should have one overarching vision for its culture independent of each employee's work environment. Armed with knowledge on how culture is perceived and experienced, you're now ready to make the necessary changes to make your culture thrive.

**Key Takeaway: Workplaces have changed forever - it's time to reassess your current culture and uncover issues that need work.**

## Refocusing Culture

After assessing where your current culture stands, you can determine if there are any components that don't align with -or are actively impeding- your organizational goals in our new normal. Take the time to rethink your employee experience and make sure it's conducive to what you're trying to achieve. Ultimately, culture guides employee behavior, so it's essential to formulate a solid plan.

*“Take the time to rethink your employee experience and make sure it’s conducive to what you’re trying to achieve. Ultimately, culture guides employee behavior, so it’s essential to formulate a solid plan.”*

But it's about more than just your business' cultural vision.

A big part of organizational culture comes from employee attitude. The right tools make your employees feel more engaged, supported, and connected to their organization. In a [2021 survey by Deloitte](#), the four top factors identified as most important to making remote/virtual work sustainable were:

1. Introducing digital collaboration and communication platforms
2. Allowing personal choice in determining how work gets done
3. Establishing new scheduling and meeting norms
4. Limit communications to standard work hours

First on the list - collaboration platforms - can be an excellent space for employees at all levels and work locations to come together to work and live out the culture. Business collaboration and communication platforms like Zoom, Teams, and Slack are great for work but also consider a separate and dedicated space to connect, communicate, appreciate and celebrate to focus on employee engagement, like [Kudos](#).

The next three factors from the list above are great examples of specific practices that can be encouraged or even mandated to build a consistent employee experience, and thus a strong culture that aligns with your goals and realigning work-life balance. Canadian company Loblaw Digital provides a great example of putting this into practice. Loblaw recently shared their [new meeting guidelines](#) on LinkedIn, which include rules about meeting times and lengths and no meetings at all on Fridays (imagine!)

Once you've settled on a vision for your culture and determined some cultural norms that make sense for your organizational goals and your employees, set up a timeline and benchmarks to track your success. Using an employee engagement system like [Kudos](#) can help with built-in analytics that tracks which aspects of organizational culture are most prominent in day-to-day work.

**Key Takeaway:** Create a culture that aligns with your organizational goals and your employees' needs. Using the right tools (systems) for work and culture building is critical for success.

*“Create a culture that aligns with your organizational goals and your employees needs. Using the right tools for culture building is critical.”*

## Reinforcing Culture in 2021

What can leadership do to reinforce and reinvigorate culture? The most important thing is to share the vision through a [clear culture statement](#) that employees can revisit often.

Another critical component to maintaining culture is how you hire. Gone are the days of hiring for culture fit. Instead, managers should be focusing on hiring for culture add. As Management scholar [Adam Grant shares in this video](#), hiring for culture fit, where candidates are hired based on shared values, isn't as effective as was once thought. He shares the importance of culture add and culture contribution. For example, if you feel your culture is stagnant and lacking new ideas? Hire someone with an entrepreneurial background.

But most importantly, what can you do on an ongoing basis? Reinforce your culture daily by living your organization's values, making sure they're understood and top of mind, and being true to the priorities you've laid out. Simply put, if your executives and managers are walking the talk, you'll get better buy-in organization-wide.

**Key Takeaways: Live your culture every day and hire for culture-add, not culture-fit. Leadership needs to be mindful of the "Say / Do" trap – lead by example, not edict.**

Organizational culture is a complex notion that can significantly impact the bottom line. A common misconception is that culture happens organically; culture should be deliberate and strategic. Take the time to reassess and refocus your culture for today's workplace and your organizational goals. Finally, start reinforcing culture daily and encourage all organization levels to do the same!

*“Lead by example, not by edict.”*

# How To Live By Your Organization's Values



Clear values give every member of your organization a sense of direction and a definition of success in every interaction and task. The right core values can drive belonging and wellbeing, improved employee engagement, and reduced turnover. But perhaps most importantly, tying performance measurement and recognition to those fundamental values enables you to build a resilient workforce with a robust culture, laser-focused on what matters most to your organization. Relating all actions and decisions to your core corporate values does improve your business performance.

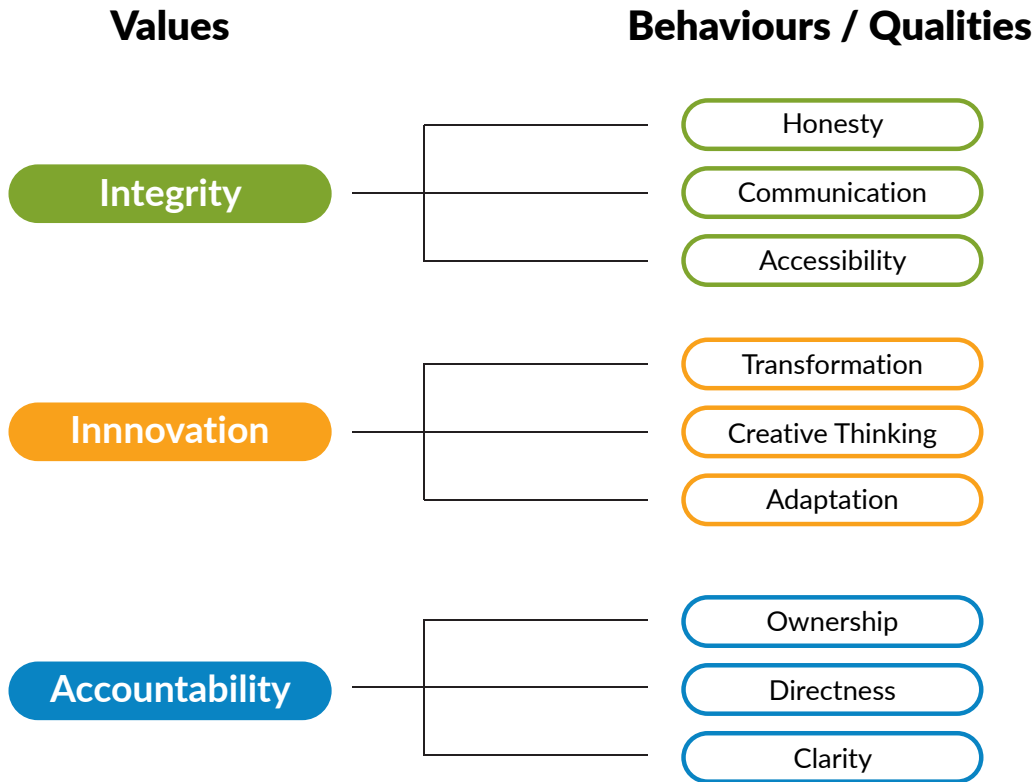
The problem is, [according to Gallup](#), that only 23% of employees strongly agree that they can apply their organization's values to their work every day. Sound familiar? Here are six ways to help you bridge that gap.

## 1. Define What Your Values Look Like in Action

Sometimes values seem too aspirational or worse, like corporate fluff. However, chances are that substance and value can be distilled from the values your organization has chosen. Identifying specific behaviors tied to each value allows your team to truly see your values as their North Star, guiding them in making decisions in day-to-day tasks. This can be especially helpful in organizations where employees work remotely, with less supervision or guidance readily available.



Let's break down some behaviors that could be tied to particular values, including Integrity, the most popular value in US companies, according to a [recent MIT Study](#).



Remember that your values will also dictate how your employees treat your clients – that should help spell out specific behaviors that matter.

**Try This:** Take some time at your next management meeting to define critical behaviors for each one of your core values. If you can't, chances are your employees can't either, and it might be time to revisit your values.

## 2. Communicate Values Consistently and Often

For your values to help you drive the culture and performance you'd like to see, your employees need to know them! Organizational values are often buried in employee manuals and/or deep in the corporate intranet. It's likely that many of your employees don't even know your values, which may be why just [27% of employees believe in their core values](#), according to Gallup.

Many organizations are getting creative about spreading the word, incorporating values into their office décor, while others display values in their standard email signatures. The common theme is to give your values a presence and have them live center stage. For a remote workforce, this could look like customer Zoom backgrounds, desktop background images, or on the homepage of your company intranet.

**Try this: Why not make your values easier to remember by developing a clever acronym!**

But remember, this comes after you've identified your core values – do not determine your values based on an ideal acronym. For example, here at Kudos, our core values are:

**Transparency**

**Happiness**

**Accountable**

**Nnovation**

**Kollaboration**

We made a simple and relevant acronym work for our values, not the other way around.

### 3. Recruit and Hire with Your Values in Mind

After you've identified key behaviors and associated them with your values, start looking for people who display those behaviors as part of your hiring process. Share your values openly and communicate to your candidates that they should be looking for value-alignment as well. Be open and honest in your interviews - If you know your organization values punctuality, and a job candidate indicates that they don't see the importance of every meeting starting exactly on time - they might not be the ideal fit.

A great example of a company being open about values in recruitment is the meal-kit company HelloFresh. Their career page features their values front and center, essentially communicating to candidates, "we aren't interested if this isn't you." Check it out. Another example is popular online shoe and clothing retailer Zappos. They have a recruitment video that displays their culture in a radical way with the purpose of attracting people who are aligned with their values and repelling those who wouldn't fit in.

**Try this: Work with your HR team to craft behavioral questions to discover if the candidates fit your core values. Here are some practical [behavioural-style interview questions](#) to get you started.**

### 4. Consider the Do/Say Divide

Leaders and executive managers are always being watched closely by the rest of the organization. Employees look to management for cues on how to act and react, especially in unusual or challenging situations (like what we experienced over the course of the last year). Leaders need to embody the core values they want their employees to live by. If transparency is a core value, leadership must be open with the entire company about any challenges they are facing. If collaboration is a corporate value, leaders should have representation from all company levels and functions on any special projects or working groups.

A great example of this is how Microsoft handled the onset of the global pandemic in 2020. Microsoft's corporate values are respect, integrity, and accountability. When Covid-19 first hit in March, [Microsoft announced](#) that they would continue to pay all hourly service providers their regular pay during the period of reduced service needs, embodying those values at a time when all employees were watching.

**Try this: Next time you're faced with a difficult situation (a core employee resigns, you lose a big contract), think about whether your reaction embodies your core values and make the necessary adjustments. Remember that your employees will follow your lead.**

## 5. Work and Play by Your Values

Consistency is critical when communicating the importance of your values to your team to show your commitment. If one of your core values is health and wellness, but you celebrate your wins with cake and alcohol, that doesn't really align – does it? For your values to stick, you need to live them in all aspects of your organization.

Here's a great example; one of Airbnb's core values is "Be the Host," so fittingly, during an annual meeting, they encouraged local employees to host their visiting colleagues for dinner at their home or at a local restaurant. This is a perfect example of truly living your values.

**Try this:** Challenge your social committee to tie any staff events and celebrations back to your corporate values. If something isn't clicking – change it! Showing you are committed to living your values helps get others on board.

## 6. Recognize and Reward Value-aligned Behaviors

One of the most straightforward ways to reinforce your values into your corporate culture and day-to-day life within your organization is to recognize value-aligned behaviors. That can happen formally as part of performance reviews but also informally through regular recognition. Informally recognizing value-aligned behaviors and contributions helps keep values top of mind, helping to build the culture you need to succeed as an organization.

**Try this:** Consider an employee recognition and engagement platform like [Kudos](#) to make daily peer-to-peer recognition easy. With Kudos, specific value-tied behaviors must be associated with each recognition message, essentially hardwiring your values into your culture.

Corporate values are a powerful tool that should not be ignored or brushed over. The right values have the power to connect your workforce and drive everyone toward a shared goal. To get there, you must incorporate your values into daily life and truly live your values every day. When values are distilled down from broad and aspirational statements to clear behaviors, employees are equipped with clear expectations, allowing them to do their job in a meaningful and valuable way, leading to improved organizational performance.

*“Informally recognizing value-aligned behaviors and contributions helps keep values top of mind, helping to build the culture you need to succeed as an organization.”*

# Communication & Remote Work: Assess Your Skills



**“Communication makes the world go round. It facilitates human connections, and allows us to learn, grow and progress. It’s not just about speaking or reading but understanding what is being said – and in some cases what is not being said.”**

*[-Richard Branson](#)*

The events of 2020 and 2021 caused a great deal of disruption in our usual work environments, and especially our means of communication. For those who have made the shift to remote or hybrid work permanently, our ability to communicate effectively has been tested.

## **The Importance of Communication in Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement and communication are closely tied. The moments of connection, inclusion, and community created by strong lines of communication are invaluable to organizations.

Cultures of good communication aren’t easy to build and maintain, but they pay big dividends. By promoting open and consistent communication standards, organizations foster higher engagement levels – and keep in mind, highly engaged workforces are over [20% more profitable](#).

**So, how do your communication skills measure up? Use the list below to assess how you're doing and identify gaps in your remote-work communication toolkit.**

### 1. Non-verbal Cues

The lack of non-verbal cues created by working in a remote setting can lead to [miscommunication, defensiveness, and conflict](#). That said, there are some non-verbal cues still available, primarily via video calls. And while we are all aware of "Zoom-fatigue," those video calls are essential to assess whether your message is being received.

Non-verbal cues also go beyond body language. Managers should take the time to interpret the tone of their employees' emails and messages to check for signs of distress, frustration, or burnout. Messages sent late at night, frequent errors, and a curt tone are some red flags to look for.

Finally, more overt actions or displays of disengagement like absenteeism or non-participation in meetings can be a red flag and a sign of a communication breakdown.

Ask yourself:

**Do I monitor the wellbeing of my colleagues by reading non-verbal communication on video calls?**

**Do I assess the tone of voice in email and chat messages?**

### 2. Access

Is your virtual door "always open?" Open-door policies are important whether you are in the office or remote. Sometimes your team needs to reach out outside of scheduled meetings and check-ins. [In a survey conducted by Slack](#), 46% of remote workers believe the best managers are the ones who check in often. What's more, a different study found that 84% of remote workers [hide workplace concerns](#) for a few days before informing higher-ups, and 47% admitted that they didn't address issues for more than a week. With that said, it's also important to set boundaries – you don't need to be available 24/7 just because your office is your home. If a task needs your undivided attention, book that time in your calendar and set any messenger apps to "do not disturb," and book other time slots to answer any questions that come up that day at a time that works for you.

Some managers address this by setting up "office hours" on Zoom where they sign into a Zoom room for an hour or two a week so their employees can pop in as needed to collaborate or ask questions.

Ask yourself:

**Am I easily accessible to my team if they need me?**

**Do I answer instant messages or emails in a relatively timely manner?**

*“Open door policies are important whether you are in the office or remote.”*

### 3. Accountability

Accountability becomes even more critical in remote work environments. Without the visual cues that come with working in a shared space, your colleagues might be worried about your ability to meet an approaching deadline, especially if you haven't communicated progress and/or have missed deadlines in the past. It's easy to give someone a quick nudge in the office's lunchroom, but it can feel intimidating to send a written message or email when working remotely.

The good news is, building trust and accountability in a virtual work environment is possible, [according to Forbes](#). Some of their recommendations include: be predictable, be easy to read, support others, hold people accountable and tell the truth. For example, predictability by keeping expectations clear and consistent can help employees know what they need to do their job well.

Ask yourself:

**Do I meet my deadlines?**

**Am I transparent about my progress on projects?**

### 4. Personal Connection

[According to Gallup](#), many remote workers are likely to feel adrift, lost, or forgotten in their new work environment. Companies are built on relationships, and while remote or distributed teams may be physically distanced, that doesn't mean they shouldn't be, or can't be, tight-knit and supportive.

The key to building personal connections? Effort. While serendipitous water-cooler run-ins may be a thing of the past, for now, it's still possible to create solid and meaningful relationships with colleagues if you make the time.

Ask yourself:

**Do I take the time to have personal conversations with my colleagues to learn about personal news and any outside stressors affecting their work?**

**Do I check-in with my team on well-being and job satisfaction?**

**Do I celebrate my team's birthdays, work anniversaries, and special life events?**

### 5. Clear Expectations

[According to David Maxfield](#), managers who are explicit with their expectations have happier teams that can deliver results. Specificity is critical in remote settings so that employees can get to work independently without waiting for guidance. Instructions like "let's do this sooner rather than later" or "let's talk next week" can be stressful and confusing, especially for remote workers who can't just pop their head into your office for advice.

Ask yourself:

**Am I clear about what I expect from my team?**

**Do I communicate clear timelines and next steps?**

## 6. Individualization

One of the keys to engaging employees is meeting their individual needs and tailoring their work experience to their preferences. The global pandemic left many workers caring for children and elderly parents during work hours – offering flexible work schedules can help ease the burden for them.

[Generational preferences](#) should also be considered, with millennials typically preferring email or chat over phone calls, and Gen X or Boomers typically preferring a traditional phone calls over a video conference. Regardless, it's essential to take the time to understand your team's preferences and accommodate them whenever possible.

Ask yourself:

**Do I know my team's communication preferences?**

**Am I considerate of other people's time? If someone has a packed calendar, do I book their last remaining 30-minutes, or do I find a day when they have fewer meetings?**

## 7. Recognition

A strong culture of recognition helps drive employee engagement and performance. Regularly communicating recognition is vital in a remote-work environment. When employees aren't physically together, it can be easy to get caught up in daily tasks and forget to recognize a job well done. It doesn't have to be complicated – [a Deloitte study](#) found that 85% of employees simply want a thank you (vs. a gift or celebration.)

A robust recognition platform like [Kudos](#) streamlines recognition across an entire organization. Peers can recognize and thank each other for great work, and managers can recognize their employees and spotlight their contributions for the organization to see.

Ask yourself:

**Am I providing regular, meaningful recognition to my employees and colleagues?**

## 8. Company Communication

Finally, communication and direction from executives and leaders must be considered and factored into any kind of communication review. Company news and successes should be communicated transparently and freely to keep employees informed and included. According to a report by [PRovoke](#) (formerly The Holmes Report), companies with effective communication strategies have 47% higher returns to shareholders, more engaged employees, and less employee turnover.

[Gallup's Q12 framework](#) is an excellent place to start when building a broad employee communication strategy. Gallup has identified 12 foundational elements of employee engagement, and using this framework as a guide, leaders can tailor communications to meet their employee's common questions and needs. Some of the twelve elements include:

**Q2: I have the materials and equipment to do my work right**

**Q5: My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person**

**Q8: The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel like my job is important**

Ask yourself:

**Does my organization have a clear communication strategy?**

**Do my leadership team's communication efforts reflect the 12 elements of the Gallup Q12 employee engagement framework?**

## **Communications Checklist For Remote Workers:**

### **Non-verbal cues:**

*Do I monitor the wellbeing of my colleagues by reading non-verbal communication on video calls?*

*Do I assess the tone of voice in email and chat messages?*

### **Access:**

*Am I easily accessible to my team if they need me?*

*Do I answer instant messages or emails in a relatively timely manner?*

### **Accountability:**

*Do I meet my deadlines? Am I transparent about my progress on projects?*

### **Personal Connection:**

*Do I take the time to have personal conversations with my colleagues to learn about personal news and any outside stressors affecting their work?*

*Do I check-in with my team on wellbeing and job satisfaction?*

*Do I celebrate my team's birthdays, work anniversaries, and special life events?*

### **Clear Expectations:**

*Am I clear about what I expect from my team?*

*Do I communicate clear timelines and next steps?*

### **Individualization:**

*Do I know my team's communication preferences?*

*Am I considerate of other people's time?*

### **Recognition:**

*Am I providing regular, meaningful recognition to my employees and colleagues?*



If you answered yes to most of the questions – congratulations! You have exceptional communication skills and are setting your team up for success in a remote work environment.

If this assessment made you realize that there are some gaps in your communication skills - don't be discouraged. Everyone is still adapting to the changes 2020 brought; it's important to be patient with yourself and focus on minor improvements every day.

With that said, communication is vital in understanding what remote workers need to perform their job today, which could be different from what they needed six months ago and will likely look different six months from now. Continuously assessing and improving your communication skills is the key to fostering a thriving and engaged workforce.

## Next Steps

The first step toward an engaged workforce is having a clear and defined plan. Employees needs and expectations are constantly changing – today's HR professionals need the first tools and partners to stay up to date and design and workplace and culture that fosters happiness, productivity, and performance.

### **Partner with the leaders in employee engagement and recognition.**

Kudos is an employee engagement, culture, and analytics platform, that harnesses the power of peer-to-peer recognition, values reinforcement, and open communication to help organizations boost employee engagement, reduce turnover, improve culture, and drive productivity and performance. Kudos uses unique proprietary methodologies to deliver essential people analytics on culture, performance, equity, and inclusion, providing organizations with deep insights and a clear understanding of their workforce.

