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2026 State of the Frontline Workplace

Data-backed frontline insights and a practical roadmap for HR leaders building Top Workplaces.

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Key Findings & Approach

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Executive Summary

The state of frontline work has reached a boiling point. Burnout, turnover, and disengagement now define the frontline experience for many employees, creating direct consequences for service quality, safety, and business continuity. In 2026, frontline culture is no longer a "people initiative"; it is a defining factor in workforce stability, performance, and retention. Frontline culture refers to the day-to-day conditions employees experience on the job, including:

- How supported they feel
- How fairly work is structured
- How connected they are to their teams
- How their contributions are recognized

This report analyzes frontline employee survey data from the 2026 Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers Award, combined with recognition and engagement insights from Bucketlist. Together, these data sources reveal a clear pattern: **organizations recognized as top frontline workplaces consistently outperform their peers across key cultural indicators that directly influence engagement, burnout, and intent to stay.**

Six cultural pillars emerge as differentiators of top frontline workplaces:

- Belonging and Team Connection
- Managers Who Listen and Act
- Fair Scheduling and Work-Life Balance
- Growth and Development
- Purpose, Values and Pride
- Recognition That Sticks

While each pillar contributes independently to employee experience, recognition stands out as the reinforcing force that strengthens them all.

> **Consistent, high quality recognition is associated with higher engagement, lower burnout, and reduced turnover intention.**

Beyond identifying what matters, this report provides a practical roadmap for HR leaders. It outlines how to assess frontline culture, use recognition to drive measurable improvement, secure leadership buy-in, and sustain progress over time. For organizations navigating persistent turnover and rising frontline pressure, the findings in this report offer a clear, data-backed path forward.

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Methodology

This report combines frontline employee survey data with recognition platform insights collected between 2025 and 2026 to identify the cultural factors that differentiate top frontline workplaces.

Data sources include large-scale anonymous employee surveys administered through the Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers Award, as well as recognition and engagement data collected through the Bucketlist platform.

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Top Workplaces Survey Data from Energage

Bucketlist partnered with Energage, an employee engagement research firm that specializes in measuring workplace culture through confidential employee surveys. The Energage platform powers the Top Workplaces program, to administer the Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers Award survey.

These anonymous surveys measure employee sentiment across 30 workplace culture factors, including leadership, alignment, workload, growth, and recognition. Responses include feedback from +120,000 frontline workers, with national benchmarks drawn from over 2 million employees across industries.

Survey results were analyzed to identify cultural patterns and differentiators among organizations recognized as Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers.

Survey respondents represent a range of frontline-intensive sectors, including healthcare, retail, manufacturing, logistics and warehousing, food service, hospitality, and customer support.

A frontline worker is defined as an employee whose role is primarily in-person, operational, or service-based and who does not typically work from a desk or remotely.

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Bucketlist Survey and Platform Data

Additional analysis is based on hundreds of responses from frontline workers collected from Bucketlist customers through the platform's survey tools. These surveys examine the relationship between recognition practices and key workforce outcomes, including engagement, satisfaction, turnover intention, stress, and burnout.

Aggregated, anonymized recognition activity data from the Bucketlist platform was also analyzed to assess how recognition frequency, quality, and platform usage relate to employee experience in frontline environments. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression modeling, were used to evaluate the strength and direction of these relationships.

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Definitions

Frontline Worker

An employee whose role is primarily in-person, operational, or service-based, and who does not typically work from a desk or remote environment.

Recognition Quality

The degree to which recognition is perceived as personalized, authentic, fair, and timely. Recognition quality is the strongest predictor of positive outcomes in this report. While recognition frequency matters, the greatest impact occurs when high quality recognition is delivered consistently by leaders and peers.

Recognition Frequency

How often an employee reports receiving recognition from leaders or peers, measured through self-reported survey responses and grouped by frequency levels.

Turnover Intention

An employee's stated likelihood of leaving their organization, measured through survey questions assessing whether they have recently considered searching for a new job.

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The Frontline Reality in 2026

Understanding what differentiates top frontline workplaces begins with understanding the broader conditions shaping frontline work today. This section provides a data-driven overview of the forces influencing employee well-being, stability, and engagement in 2026.

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What Frontline Teams Are Up Against

Frontline workers make up 80% of the global workforce (HR Dive, 2026), yet they continue to face some of the most challenging workplace conditions. Data from 2025-2026 indicates that declining well-being, elevated burnout, persistent turnover, and safety concerns are driven by a combination of structural and operational factors.

Key contributors include:

- Chronic staffing shortages
- Unpredictable scheduling
- High emotional and physical job demands
- Limited managerial capacity to provide consistent support

Workforce researchers consistently note that these conditions extend beyond the workplace, contributing to sustained stress, fatigue, and disengagement that affect employees' health, financial security, and overall quality of life. For organizations, the impact is measurable, increasing absenteeism, healthcare costs, error rates, and voluntary turnover. These forces form the context in which frontline culture is experienced and against which all cultural initiatives must operate.

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Declining Well-Being and Emotional Strain

LIFE EVALUATION (Gallup, 2025)

↓ **58%** STRUGGLING

↑ **33%** THRIVING

DAILY EMOTIONS (Gallup, 2025)

⚡ **40%** DAILY STRESS

☹ **23%** SADNESS

These conditions signal a workforce experiencing sustained emotional load. In frontline roles, where demands are higher and buffers are fewer, declining well-being directly impacts energy, resilience, and performance.

"[Frontline] workers face demanding and potentially traumatic situations daily... Building resilience means creating space to refill the bucket so people feel supported and able to keep showing up."
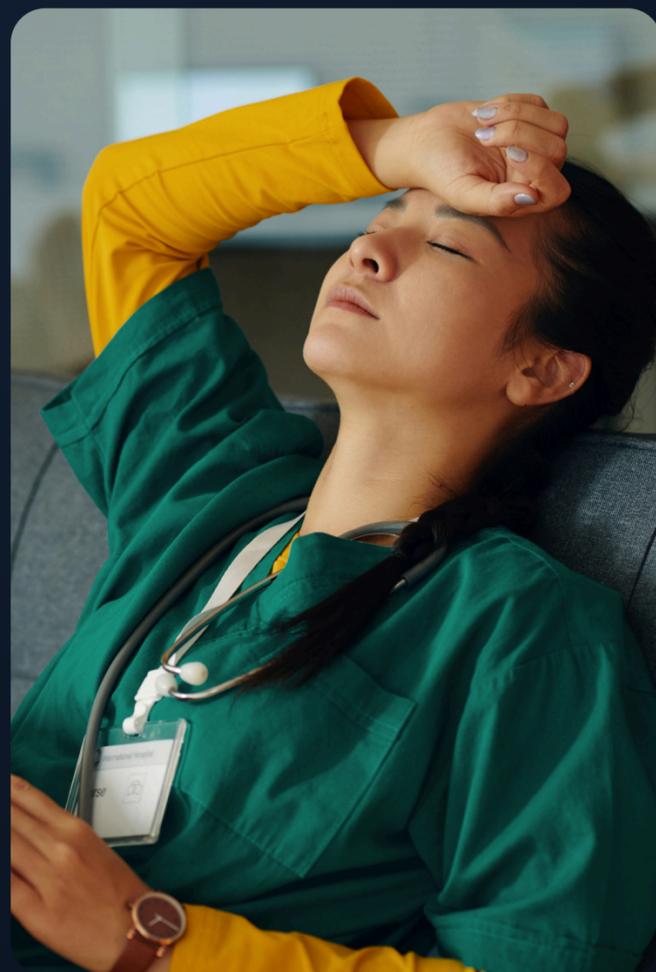
-Misty Fortier, Director, Credentialing Centre and Nursing Policy at Canadian Nurses Association.

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Burnout Has Become Structural

76% of frontline employees report experiencing burnout

(HR Executive, 2025)

Burnout in frontline roles is no longer episodic or role-specific; it is embedded in how work is structured. Chronic staffing shortages, unpredictable workloads, and sustained customer-facing pressure leave little room for recovery, steadily eroding resilience and increasing turnover risk.

As operational gaps persist, frontline employees absorb the impact. Over time, this sustained strain reduces engagement, compromises performance, and makes long-term retention increasingly difficult.

KEY INSIGHTS

Burnout is one of the strongest predictors of voluntary turnover in frontline roles.

Employees experiencing burnout are 2.6x more likely to actively seek a new job than those who are not burned out.

(Gallup, 2020)

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Persistent Turnover and Talent Instability

41% of frontline employees and **38%** of frontline managers changed jobs in the past year

(SHRM, 2024)

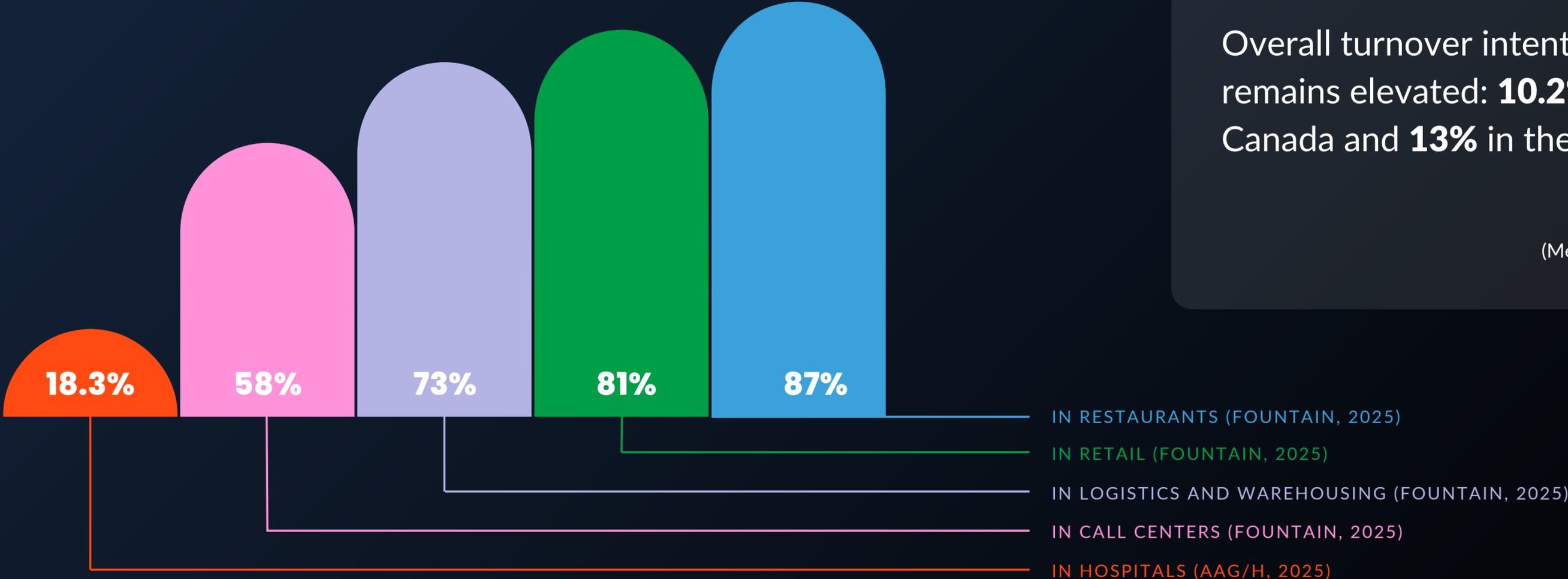Half of the workforce — **50%** — is watching or actively seeking a new job

(Gallup, 2025)

KEY INSIGHTS

Replacing a single skilled frontline worker can cost between **$10,000** and **$40,000**, factoring in hiring, onboarding, and lost productivity

(Deloitte, 2025)

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Turnover rates in major frontline industries:

Overall turnover intention remains elevated: **10.2%** in Canada and **13%** in the U.S.

(Mercer, 2025)

18.3% 58% 73% 81% 87%

IN RESTAURANTS (FOUNTAIN, 2025)

IN RETAIL (FOUNTAIN, 2025)

IN LOGISTICS AND WAREHOUSING (FOUNTAIN, 2025)

IN CALL CENTERS (FOUNTAIN, 2025)

IN HOSPITALS (AAG/H, 2025)

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Safety, Predictability, and Stability Gaps

Nearly **33%** of frontline workers say they feel unsafe at work

(SHRM, 2024)

Deficits in these areas contribute to heightened stress and uncertainty, even in environments without acute physical risk.

Survey feedback indicates that unpredictable schedules, staffing shortages, and rapidly changing operational demands are primary sources of strain. When stability and predictability are lacking, employee trust declines, increasing cognitive and emotional load and making frontline roles more difficult to sustain, particularly for long-tenured employees.

KEY INSIGHTS

In the context of frontline roles, safety encompasses more than exposure to physical hazards. It includes predictable scheduling, sufficient staffing, clarity of role expectations, access to supervisory support, and confidence that working conditions will remain stable over time.

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5 Pressures Shaping Frontline Work:

Rising Disengagement and the "Disconnection Effect"

Only **21%** of employees are engaged

(Gallup, 2025)

17% of North American workers are actively disengaged

(Gallup, 2025)

Low engagement is a sign of cultural disconnection — between effort and acknowledgment, between employees and leadership, and between the work and its broader meaning. In frontline environments, disengagement contributes directly to absenteeism, lower service quality, and higher turnover.

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What Top Frontline Workplaces Do Differently

Across organizations recognized as Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers, six cultural pillars: Belonging and Team Connection, Managers that Listen and Act, Scheduling and Work-Life Balance, Growth and Development, Purpose, Values and Pride, and Recognition That Sticks, consistently emerge from employee survey data. While these pillars reflect different aspects of the frontline experience, they are deeply interconnected.

6 Pillars of Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers

1

Belonging and Team Connection

2

Managers Who Listen and Act

3

Fair Scheduling and Work-Life Balance

4

Growth and Development

5

Purpose, Values and Pride

6

Recognition That Sticks

2026 Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers Award Winner

"Being named a Top Workplace for Frontline Workers is especially meaningful because it reflects the voices of the people who power our work every day. This recognition reinforces our belief that when you invest in your people, everyone wins."

– **Hudson Smith-Bothun, Talent Experience Manager at Tax Advisors Group**

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Belonging & Team Connection

In frontline environments defined by high turnover and operational pressure, belonging is the factor that keeps teams stable when conditions are demanding.

Top frontline workplaces create environments where employees feel connected to their teams and experience a sense of belonging that sustains them through demanding work.

What the Data Shows

Among frontline workers surveyed, 80% agreed that their job makes them feel part of something meaningful (Energage, 2025). Recognition data further shows that employees who experience recognition at least monthly from leaders see a 15% increase in engagement, and those that experience recognition at least monthly from peers see a 17% increase (Bucketlist, 2025). In high-pressure environments, peers fuel daily momentum.

What Employees Told Us

Frontline employees frequently described strong peer relationships as a reason they stay. Team support, shared accountability, and feeling appreciated by coworkers were common themes, particularly during busy or high-stress periods.

Why This Pillar Matters

Belonging reduces disengagement and turnover risk in frontline environments where team stability is often fragile. Strong connections help employees remain committed even when work is physically or emotionally demanding.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

Bucketlist research data revealed that employees who receive peer recognition monthly or more see a 16.7% increase in engagement and are 8.8% less likely to leave.

This confirms that a culture of "having each other's back" is a primary driver of workforce stability. Recognition reinforces belonging by making teamwork visible. Peer recognition, in particular, strengthens connection and inclusion, reinforcing the social bonds that frontline employees rely on daily.

80% of respondents agree that their job makes them feel part of something meaningful

Employees who experience recognition at least monthly from leaders see a 15% increase in engagement

Those that experience recognition at least monthly from peers see a 17% increase in engagement

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Managers Who Listen and Act

For frontline employees, managers shape the day-to-day work experience more than any other factor. When managers listen and act on feedback, trust increases, engagement improves, and turnover risk declines.

In top frontline workplaces, employees consistently report feeling heard, supported, and advocated for by their direct managers.

What the Data Shows

82% of frontline employees agreed that their manager cares about their concerns (Energage, 2025). In healthcare specifically, when leaders provide high quality recognition to their staff at least monthly, there is a 50% increase in satisfaction, as well as a 23% decrease in burnout and 25% less stress, proving just how powerful engaged leadership can be in driving results (Bucketlist, 2025).

Bucketlist research data also revealed that a manager's ability to recognize their team is the strongest predictor of contentment. When leaders move from rare to monthly recognition, employee satisfaction jumps by 28%. Furthermore, these employees are 14% less likely to consider quitting, proving that consistent leader appreciation is a direct defense against turnover.

What Employees Told Us

Employees described managers who checked in regularly, listened to concerns about workload or scheduling, and advocated for their teams. When leadership listening was present, employees reported higher confidence and motivation.

Why This Pillar Matters

Frontline managers serve as the primary connection between employees and the organization. When employees feel heard, trust increases and disengagement decreases.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

Recognition makes listening visible. Leader-driven recognition signals that employee input is valued and acted upon, reinforcing trust and strengthening the manager-employee relationship.

82% of frontline employees agreed that their manager cares about their concerns

When leaders move from rare to monthly recognition, employee satisfaction jumps by 28%

Frequently recognized employees are 14% less likely to consider quitting

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Managers Who Listen and Act

MANAGER TIP

Schedule regular, brief check-ins focused on listening rather than problem-solving. Ask employees what is making their work harder or easier, then follow up with visible action or acknowledgment to show that feedback leads to change.

"At Bucketlist, we coach people managers to see listening as a core leadership responsibility, not a one-off activity. That means creating regular opportunities for employees to share what's working and what isn't, and then closing the loop with visible follow-through. When managers consistently acknowledge feedback and act on it, trust builds and teams feel supported."

– Katie Wray, Director of People and Culture at Bucketlist

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Scheduling & Work–Life Balance

When frontline schedules are unpredictable or perceived as unfair, employees experience higher stress, greater burnout, and increased intent to leave. Scheduling stability is a foundational condition for retention, safety, and sustained performance in frontline roles.

Top frontline workplaces place greater emphasis on fairness and predictability, helping employees manage work alongside personal responsibilities.

What the Data Shows

71% of frontline employees at Top Workplaces feel that their workplace stress is manageable for them (Energage, 2025). When leadership provides recognition at least once per month, employee stress decreases by 9% and by 6% when recognized by peers. Furthermore, high quality leadership recognition has been shown to reduce stress by as much as 25% when both frequency and quality are present in recognition efforts (Bucketlist, 2025).

What Employees Told Us

Employees frequently referenced scheduling consistency, adequate staffing, and flexibility as factors that made their roles more sustainable. When schedules were unpredictable, stress and frustration increased.

Why This Pillar Matters

Predictability reduces burnout and supports retention. In frontline roles, perceived fairness in scheduling directly affects emotional well-being.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

When frontline schedules are demanding or unpredictable, recognition becomes a critical stabilizer. Regular, high quality recognition reduces stress and burnout by affirming that extra effort and flexibility are seen and valued. In environments where control over schedules is limited, recognition helps preserve trust, resilience, and employees' willingness to stay.

71% of frontline employees at Top Workplaces feel that their workplace stress is manageable for them

When leadership provides recognition at least once per month, employee stress decreases by 9%

High quality leadership recognition has been shown to reduce stress by as much as 25%

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Growth & Development

Without access to growth and development, frontline roles are perceived as dead-end jobs, leading employees to disengage faster and leave sooner, even when other aspects of the workplace are positive.

Access to growth and development opportunities differentiates top frontline workplaces, yet remains a key gap across the workforce.

What the Data Shows

68% of frontline employees at Top Workplaces for frontline workers said they have frequent opportunities to learn and grow at their company (Energage, 2025). Recognition is strongly linked to engagement and satisfaction with high quality recognition driving 30% higher engagement in frontline employees compared to those receiving generic or low-quality praise.

What Employees Told Us

Employees expressed a desire for clearer career pathways, skill development, and advancement opportunities. When growth felt limited, employees were more likely to consider leaving.

Why This Pillar Matters

Growth signals long-term investment. Without it, frontline roles are more likely to be viewed as temporary, accelerating turnover.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

Recognition reinforces growth by highlighting learning, progress, and skill development. Acknowledging improvement helps employees see a future within the organization.

68% of frontline employees at Top Workplaces for frontline workers said they have frequent opportunities to learn and grow at their company

High quality recognition drives 30% higher engagement among frontline employees compared to those receiving generic or low-quality praise

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Purpose, Values & Pride

In frontline roles where work is demanding and often emotionally taxing, purpose and values provide the reason employees continue to show up. When employees do not feel proud of their organization or connected to its values, motivation erodes and retention weakens.

Purpose and pride anchor frontline employees, especially in roles tied to service, care, and community impact.

What the Data Shows

83% of frontline employees agreed that their company operates by strong values (Energage, 2025). When employees are provided with frequent, high quality recognition from leaders they are 14% less likely to think about leaving, resulting in greater loyalty and retention rates.

What Employees Told Us

Employees described pride in their organization's mission and values. Many felt more motivated when their work was connected to a larger purpose.

Why This Pillar Matters

Purpose strengthens commitment during challenging periods and reinforces why the work matters beyond daily tasks.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

Recognition connects daily actions to organizational values, making purpose tangible and reinforcing pride in the work being done.

83% of frontline employees agreed that their company operates by strong values

Employees that experience recognition at least monthly from peers see a 17% increase in engagement.

Employees who receive frequent, high quality recognition are 14% less likely to think about leaving

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Purpose, Values & Pride

MANAGER TIP

Regularly connect daily work back to the organization's mission and values. In team meetings or one-on-ones, explain how specific tasks, decisions, or services contribute to a larger impact so employees can see why their work matters beyond the shift.

"When people are recognized for living the values, they stop feeling like they're just doing a job and start feeling proud of where they work. That sense of purpose is what keeps people engaged, especially when the work is hard."

– Jason Lindstrom, CEO of Bucketlist Rewards

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Recognition That Sticks

Recognition directly shapes how frontline employees experience work. When effort goes unseen, engagement declines and turnover risk rises. When recognition is consistent and meaningful, it strengthens trust, reinforces positive behavior, and stabilizes culture across frontline teams.

Recognition is both a standalone pillar and a multiplier that strengthens every other aspect of frontline culture.

What the Data Shows

Moving from low to high quality recognition leads to a 42% decrease in turnover intention and a 23% reduction in burnout (Bucketlist, 2025).

What Employees Told Us

Employees described recognition as a signal that their efforts were noticed beyond productivity metrics. Feeling appreciated increased motivation, confidence, and emotional resilience.

Why This Pillar Matters

Recognition directly influences how employees experience work. When recognition is absent, effort feels invisible. When it is consistent and meaningful, culture becomes more sustainable.

How Recognition Reinforces This Pillar

Recognition sustains itself by reinforcing behaviors aligned with organizational values, strengthening engagement, reducing burnout, and lowering turnover across frontline teams.

Together, these six pillars reflect the cultural patterns consistently present in Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers. While each pillar contributes independently to employee experience, recognition acts as the reinforcing force that strengthens them all.

"We've seen engagement rise, retention stabilize, and recognition become second nature. It's not a program anymore — it's who we are."

— Cody Blasi, Experience Manager at Credit Union of America, reflecting on the impact of their recognition program

Moving from low to high quality recognition leads to a 42% decrease in turnover intention

Frequent Peer Recognition (monthly or more) drives a 16.65% increase in employee engagement

Moving from low to high quality recognition leads to a 23% reduction in burnout

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Roadmap: Build a Top Frontline Culture

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Diagnose Your Culture

Frontline cultures do not improve by accident. In organizations recognized as Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers, progress begins with a disciplined understanding of what employees experience each day. Listening is the diagnostic step that reveals the conditions shaping retention, engagement, and performance. Before leaders introduce new initiatives, they must first build an accurate picture of their workforce's lived reality.

Diagnose Your Culture

Frontline culture does not improve through assumption. It improves when organizations develop a clear, shared understanding of what employees experience each day. Data from 2025 shows that frontline workers consistently report lower sentiment than national benchmarks across most cultural measures, making disciplined listening the starting point for any meaningful improvement effort (Energage, 2025).

41% of employees say they are rarely or never asked for input in the workplace.

(HRD, 2025)

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Listen to Your Frontline Team

Frontline employees provide the most accurate view of workplace culture because they experience it directly. Given that only 21% of employees are engaged and 50% are actively watching or seeking a new job, relying on informal impressions or lagging metrics is no longer sufficient (Gallup, 2025).

Effective listening combines multiple inputs:

Anonymous surveys

Anonymous engagement surveys provide a baseline view of frontline sentiment across areas such as leadership trust, communication, workload, growth, and recognition. In the 2025 Top Workplaces survey data, frontline employees scored lower than national benchmarks on 27 of 30 cultural factors, highlighting the need for targeted action rather than broad initiatives (Energage, 2025).

Huddles and informal conversations

The degree to which recognition is perceived as personalized, authentic, fair, and timely. Recognition quality is the strongest predictor of positive outcomes in this report. While recognition frequency matters, the greatest impact occurs when high quality recognition is delivered consistently by leaders and peers.

Recognition and platform data

Recognition activity provides a real-time indicator of cultural health. Bucketlist data shows that recognition is strongly linked to engagement, satisfaction, stress, burnout, and turnover intention, making recognition data a valuable listening tool rather than simply a reward metric (Bucketlist, 2025).

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Align Leadership Around a Shared Cultural Direction

Once cultural gaps are clear, leadership alignment determines whether insights translate into action.

Align on what "good" looks like

Leaders must agree on what frontline employees should experience day to day. This includes clarity around expectations for communication, recognition, scheduling fairness, and support during high-pressure periods.

Prioritize focus areas for the year

Rather than attempting to address everything at once, high-performing organizations select two or three cultural priorities tied to measurable outcomes such as engagement, turnover, or burnout. This focus increases accountability and accelerates progress.

Align on what needs to change

Data-driven alignment ensures that decisions are grounded in employee experience rather than anecdote. When leaders share a common understanding of gaps, responses become more consistent across teams, shifts, and locations.

70% of change initiatives fail, largely due to lack of leadership alignment and focus

(Forbes, 2025)

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Clarify Expectations for People Managers

Understanding frontline culture requires consistent participation from people managers. While HR may design listening mechanisms such as surveys, huddles, and check-ins, managers are responsible for making these practices meaningful in day-to-day work.

Checklist: How HR leaders should set expectations

HR leaders should clearly communicate that listening to frontline employees is a core management responsibility, not a one-time initiative. Expectations should be framed around consistent participation in the practices used to evaluate culture, including:

- ☐ Supporting and encouraging participation in anonymous surveys

- ☐ Creating space for open discussion during huddles and informal conversations

- ☐ Using regular check-ins to surface concerns related to workload, scheduling, morale, and support

Reinforcing recognition practices that reflect what employees value
By linking these actions, HR leaders help managers understand how individual behaviors contribute to a broader, organization-wide view of culture.

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Clarify Expectations for People Managers

How HR should reinforce and monitor follow-through

To ensure these practices are carried out consistently, HR leaders should monitor indicators that reflect whether listening is occurring in practice.

These include:

1 Participation rates in surveys, check-ins, and recognition activity

2 Patterns in engagement, sentiment, or turnover across teams and locations

3 Employee feedback indicating whether concerns are acknowledged and addressed

Rather than relying on self-reporting, these signals allow HR leaders to identify where listening practices are embedded and where additional support or clarity may be needed.

Clear expectations and consistent monitoring help ensure that frontline culture is evaluated continuously, not episodically, and that insights reflect real employee experience rather than isolated inputs.
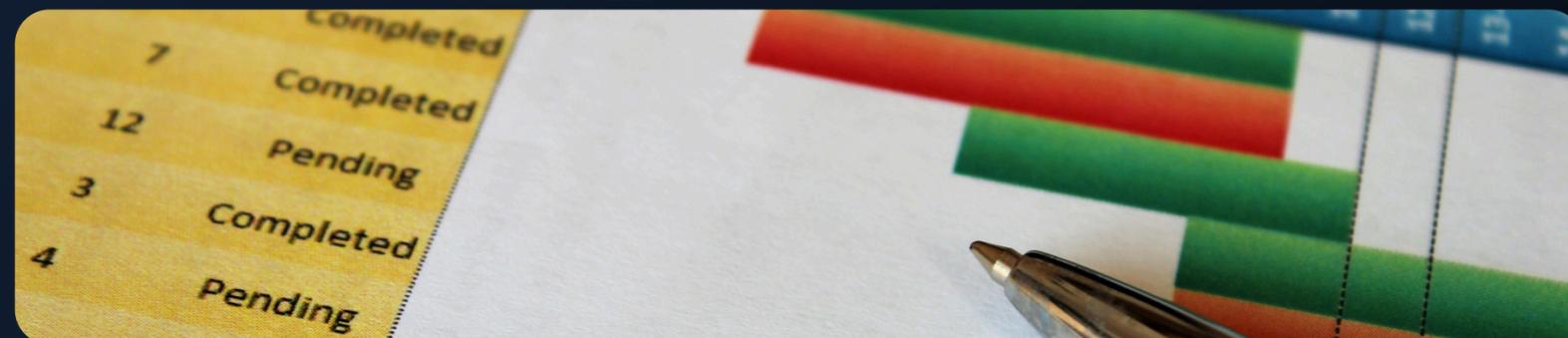
47% of employees feel there is a lack of follow-through when it comes to company promises

(Forbes, 2023)

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Start Improving Culture

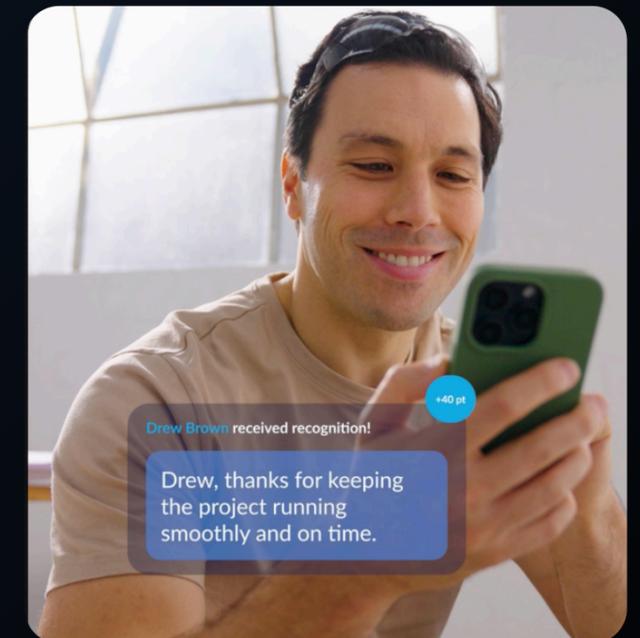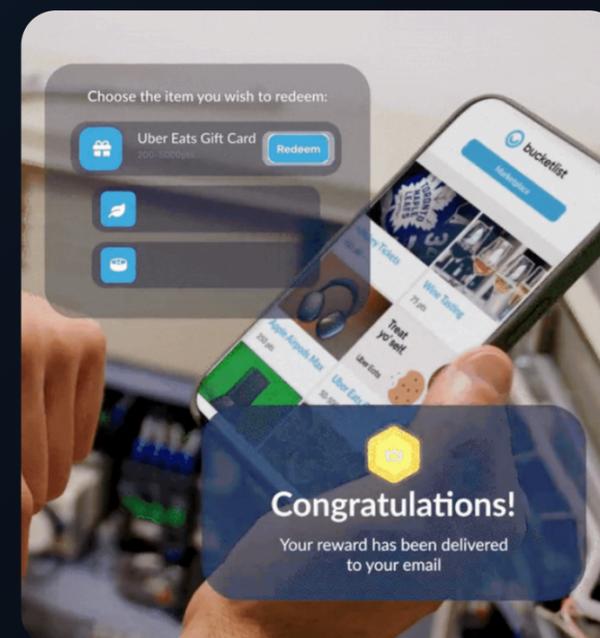## Using Recognition as Your Most Effective Tool

Once organizations understand their frontline culture, the question becomes how to change it. Data from both frontline surveys and broader workforce research points to one clear answer: recognition is the most effective and immediate lever for improving culture.

DEFINITION REMINDER

High Quality Recognition

Recognition that is authentic, fair, timely, and personalized. While frequency matters, recognition quality is the strongest predictor of impact. The highest gains occur when recognition is both frequent and meaningful.

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Why Recognition Is the Most Effective Tool for Improving Frontline Culture

Frontline leaders consistently identify the same challenges: high turnover, low engagement, burnout, inconsistent communication, and limited trust in leadership. Recognition addresses each of these pain points because it shapes how employees interpret their value, effort, and connection to the organization.

Recognition improves engagement and retention

Bucketlist data shows a strong relationship between recognition and key workforce outcomes. Users who are recognized monthly or more by their leaders are 18% less likely to leave the organization compared to those who receive minimal manager recognition, meaning that as recognition increases, engagement rises and intent to leave declines (Bucketlist, 2025).

Furthermore, frontline workers receiving high quality recognition are 30.17% more engaged than those receiving generic or low-quality praise (Bucketlist, 2025).

Recognition increases satisfaction and stability

Recognition is one of the strongest predictors of job satisfaction. High quality recognition results in a 50.08% increase in overall satisfaction (Bucketlist, 2025). In frontline environments where pay and scheduling constraints often exist, satisfaction driven by recognition becomes a critical stabilizing force.

Recognition reduces burnout and stress

Frontline roles carry sustained emotional and physical demands. Recognition acts as a buffer against exhaustion. Data shows that employees recognized monthly or more by leaders report 8.66% less stress, while high quality recognition leads to a 23.21% reduction in burnout.

IMPACT OF HIGH QUALITY RECOGNITION

18% LESS LIKELY TO LEAVE

23% REDUCTION IN BURNOUT

31% MORE ENGAGED

51% INCREASE IN SATISFACTION

9% LESS STRESS

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Using Recognition to Strengthen Your Culture Gaps

Recognition is most effective when it is aligned to the cultural gaps uncovered in Step 1. Rather than applying recognition generically, high-performing organizations use it to reinforce specific behaviors and experiences they want to strengthen.

Reinforce belonging and connection

Peer-to-peer recognition increases engagement by 17% when it occurs monthly or more (Bucketlist, 2025). Highlighting teamwork, collaboration, and support reinforces social connection in environments where turnover and shift changes can erode continuity.

Support leadership listening and trust

Employees who get recognized monthly or more by their leaders are 13% less likely to think about quitting and 28% more satisfied in their roles (Bucketlist, 2025). When leaders recognize employees for raising concerns, adapting to change, or supporting others, listening becomes visible and credible.

KEY INSIGHTS

Employees who get recognized monthly or more by their leaders are **13%** less likely to think about quitting and **28%** more satisfied in their roles

(Bucketlist, 2025)

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Using Recognition to Strengthen Your Culture Gaps

Offset stress from scheduling and workload pressure

While recognition does not change schedules directly, it meaningfully reduces the emotional impact of demanding work. Employees receiving high quality recognition report 25% less stress than those receiving low-quality recognition (Bucketlist, 2025).

Reinforce growth, progress, and purpose

Recognition tied to learning, skill development, or value-driven behavior reinforces growth and meaning even when formal advancement is limited. This helps employees see a future within the organization rather than viewing their role as temporary.

KEY INSIGHTS

Employees receiving high quality recognition report **25%** less stress than those receiving low-quality recognition

(Bucketlist, 2025)

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How to Make Recognition Consistent and Scalable

Recognition delivers measurable results only when it is consistent. In frontline environments with multiple locations, shifts, and managers, informal recognition quickly becomes uneven. Top Workplaces rely on structured recognition platforms to ensure appreciation is timely, equitable, and sustained as organizations grow.

Consistency during peak periods protects culture

Turnover, staffing shortages, and seasonal demand often disrupt cultural practices.

System-supported recognition continues during high-pressure periods, reinforcing stability. Recognition is associated with lower stress and burnout, including a 25% reduction in stress and a 23% reduction in burnout when recognition quality is high (Bucketlist, 2025).

When recognition is supported by scalable systems, it moves from intention to infrastructure.

Visibility and equity strengthen engagement across the frontline

Distributed frontline teams require shared visibility. Systems that centralize recognition and support mobile access ensure appreciation reaches employees across shifts and locations. Peer recognition, when enabled at scale, drives a 17% increase in engagement (Bucketlist, 2025).

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How to Make Recognition Consistent and Scalable

Centralized systems reduce HR burden while improving outcomes

Manual recognition programs are difficult to sustain at scale. Centralized platforms reduce administrative effort, increase participation, and create consistency across teams. Higher recognition platform usage is associated with a 13% increase in engagement and a 30% increase in satisfaction, while reducing turnover intention by 18% (Bucketlist, 2025).

Employees who engage with a recognition platform monthly or more are nearly 30% more satisfied and 17.5% less likely to leave, reinforcing that centralized systems do more than simplify administration.

They create the reliability culture requires.

Automated recognition increases impact

Automating milestones such as onboarding, anniversaries, and achievements ensures recognition happens on time and without reliance on individual managers.

Consistency matters: employees who receive recognition monthly or more are 13% less likely to consider leaving, and those receiving high quality recognition show a 42% decrease in turnover intention (Bucketlist, 2025).

KEY INSIGHTS

Higher recognition platform usage is associated with a 13% increase in engagement and a 30% increase in satisfaction, while reducing turnover intention by 18%

(Bucketlist, 2025)

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How to Secure Buy-In From Leadership

Once culture gaps are clear and recognition is identified as the lever for change, the next step is leadership approval. Buy-in is strongest when recognition is positioned as a disciplined investment tied to measurable outcomes.

What Leaders Expect to See

When evaluating recognition initiatives, leaders look for three things:

Business impact

Leaders want evidence that recognition influences retention, engagement, and burnout. Bucketlist data shows that high quality recognition is associated with a 42% decrease in turnover intention, alongside meaningful gains in engagement and satisfaction (Bucketlist, 2025).

Financial justification

Executives expect a clear connection between cultural investment and cost reduction. Recognition improves workforce stability, reduces hiring costs, and supports productivity in frontline environments.

Operational clarity

Leaders need confidence that recognition can be implemented consistently across locations and shifts without increasing administrative burden.

> High quality recognition is associated with a 42% decrease in turnover intention
>
> (Bucketlist, 2025)

MORE ENGAGED

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How to Build the Case

Three tools to help you secure buy-in on your recognition program:

ROI Calculator

Try the Calculator

Use the Bucketlist ROI Calculator to estimate the financial impact of improved retention and engagement using your organization's workforce data. This frames recognition in terms leaders already use to evaluate investments.

Ready-to-Use Pitch Deck

Download the Deck

Use the ROI ready-to-use presentation deck to connect recognition outcomes directly to current priorities such as reducing turnover, improving engagement during peak periods, and supporting frontline managers.

How Bucketlist Works

Get the Guide

Use the How Bucketlist Works guide to show how recognition operates at scale with minimal operational disruption.

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Start with visible momentum

Define participation expectations, embed recognition into existing routines, and track early indicators such as participation rates and recognition frequency. Early visibility builds confidence and accelerates adoption. When recognition is presented as data-backed, financially sound, and operationally feasible, leaders are far more likely to approve and champion the initiative.

With alignment in place, organizations can move into sustaining and measuring long-term culture impact.

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Measure, Improve, and Sustain Culture Over Time

Becoming a top frontline workplace is not the result of a one-time initiative. It requires ongoing measurement, adjustment, and reinforcement. Once recognition is implemented, the same systems used to deliver recognition can also be used to monitor culture health and guide continuous improvement.
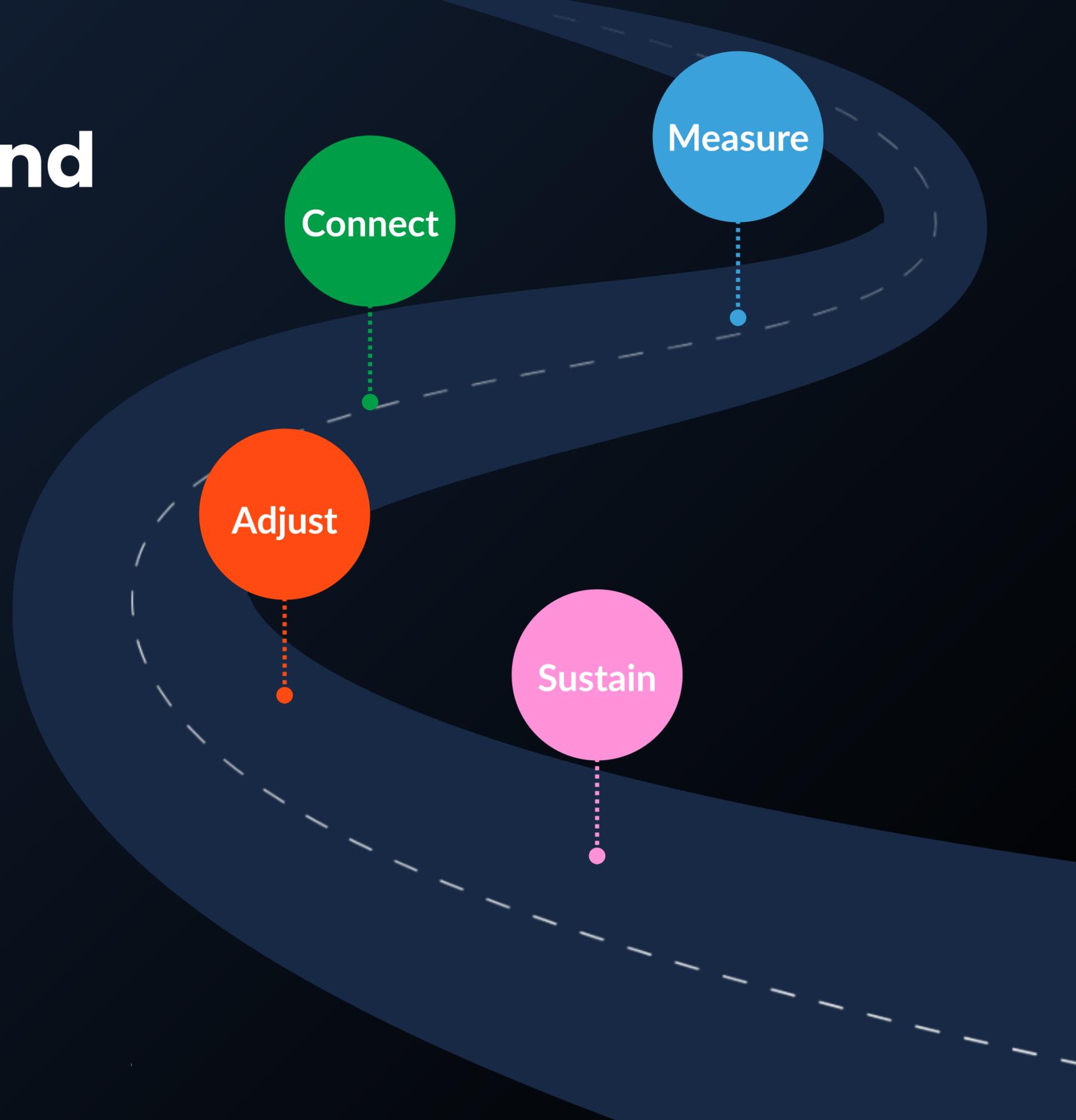
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Measure, Improve, and Sustain Culture

01 **Measure**
Monitor recognition activity as a real-time culture signal

02 **Connect**
Link recognition data to engagement, retention, and cost metrics

03 **Adjust**
Address gaps by team, role, or location

04 **Sustain**
Embed recognition into routines and reporting

Measure

Connect

Adjust

Sustain

Measuring and Improving Culture

Measure culture using recognition data

Recognition activity provides a real-time signal of how employees experience the workplace. Participation rates, recognition frequency, and distribution across teams and roles help leaders understand whether culture is strengthening or uneven.

These indicators allow HR leaders to assess sentiment between survey cycles and identify early signs of disengagement before they appear in turnover or absenteeism data.

BUCKETLIST DATA SHOWS THAT HIGHER RECOGNITION ACTIVITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH:

↓ **18%** LOWER TURNOVER INTENTION

↑ **24%** HIGHER SATISFACTION

Anchor culture progress in business metrics

Recognition should be measured using the same metrics leaders already care about:

- Engagement and satisfaction scores
- Voluntary turnover and retention rates
- Burnout and stress indicators
- Costs associated with hiring and replacement

Using tools like the **Bucketlist ROI Calculator,** HR leaders can connect changes in recognition activity to estimated cost savings from improved retention and engagement. This reinforces recognition as a measurable business driver, not a qualitative initiative.

Try the ROI Calculator

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Improving and Sustaining Culture

Sustain engagement and momentum

Sustained culture improvement depends on consistency. Embedding recognition into regular routines, leadership expectations, and reporting cycles helps ensure it remains active beyond initial launch.

Recognition platforms support this by maintaining visibility, automating key moments, and providing ongoing insight into participation and impact. This continuity is what allows recognition to scale, adapt, and remain effective over time.

Adjust based on what the data reveals

No culture program works perfectly from day one. Recognition data helps leaders see where participation is strong and where it lags.

If certain teams, shifts, or locations show lower engagement, leaders can adjust by reinforcing manager participation, clarifying expectations, or refocusing recognition on priority behaviors.

This ability to course-correct keeps recognition relevant as conditions change.

KEY INSIGHTS

Bucketlist users who interact with the platform monthly or more are **18%** less likely to leave the organization, and 30% more satisfied compared to those who rarely engage with the platform.

(Bucketlist, 2025)

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Final Takeaways

The findings in this report show that frontline culture functions as a system. The six pillars identified are deeply interconnected, and when reinforcement is inconsistent, culture weakens under pressure.

Organizations recognized as Top Workplaces for Frontline Workers distinguish themselves by sustaining consistency across listening, leadership behavior, and daily reinforcement.

Across the data, recognition emerges as the mechanism that holds this system together. It connects values to action, stabilizes teams during disruption, and provides leaders with a reliable way to influence frontline experience. For HR leaders, the takeaway is not to add more initiatives, but to reinforce what matters most and sustain it with discipline.
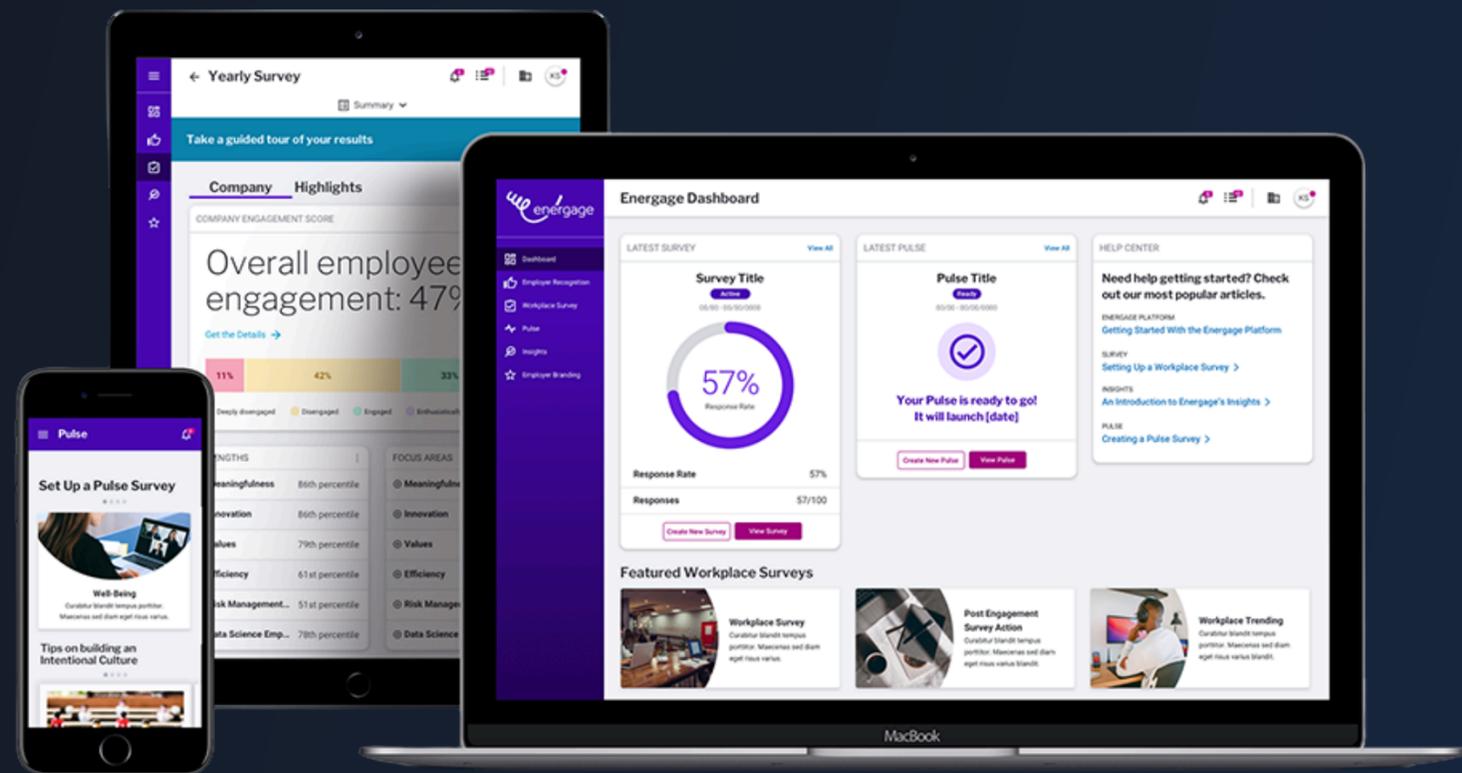
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About Energage

Energage is an HR technology company on a mission to help organizations build and brand exceptional workplace cultures. It powers the Top Workplaces employer recognition program and delivers actionable, research-backed employee survey insights that fuel professional growth and elevate employer brands.

Its comprehensive talent experience platform combines cutting-edge tools, expert guidance, and built-in personalization to cultivate cultures that boost engagement, improve retention, attract top talent, and drive better business results. Learn more at energage.com and topworkplaces.com.

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About Bucketlist Rewards

Bucketlist is a recognition and rewards platform that helps organizations build stronger cultures through consistent, meaningful appreciation. Used by frontline, healthcare, and enterprise organizations, Bucketlist enables timely, equitable recognition aligned to company values across teams, shifts, and locations.

The platform combines peer and leader recognition, automated milestones, and flexible rewards with real-time insights into engagement, retention, and employee sentiment. By treating recognition as infrastructure rather than an initiative, Bucketlist helps organizations reinforce culture at scale. Learn more at bucketlistrewards.com.

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Chelsea received recognition! +50 pt

Chelsea, I couldn't have managed today without you. Thank you!

Chelsea received an award! +100 pt

Shift Hero Award

The only recognition tool you need

Instant, visible and customisable recognition

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