RewardGateway
the employee engagement people

5 Magic Steps to Employee Recognition Program Success

Innovative ideas to take your program from zero to hero

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Introduction

Hi,

I'm Debra Corey, Group Reward Director at Reward Gateway, and I've launched employee recognition programs at a variety of companies of all sizes and in many different industries over the course of my career. It's becoming more and more clear that employee recognition is no longer a "nice-to-have," but a "must have" in organisations who are looking to engage their workforce and embed their company values in new and exciting ways. But where to start? Choosing the right kind of moments of recognition is so important to show that you've been listening to what your employees want, need and enjoy receiving.

This eBook will walk you through the steps needed to launch a top-notch employee recognition program, including:

- **How to define your employee recognition strategy.**

- **How to make key recognition design decisions.**

- **How to shine a light on your program to increase engagement.**

- **Effective ways to measure the success of your programs.**

- **Names and examples of employee recognition programs.**

We'll look at some of the things we do here at Reward Gateway as employee engagement thought leaders, as well as things I've done throughout my career at other organisations. Now, let's get started...
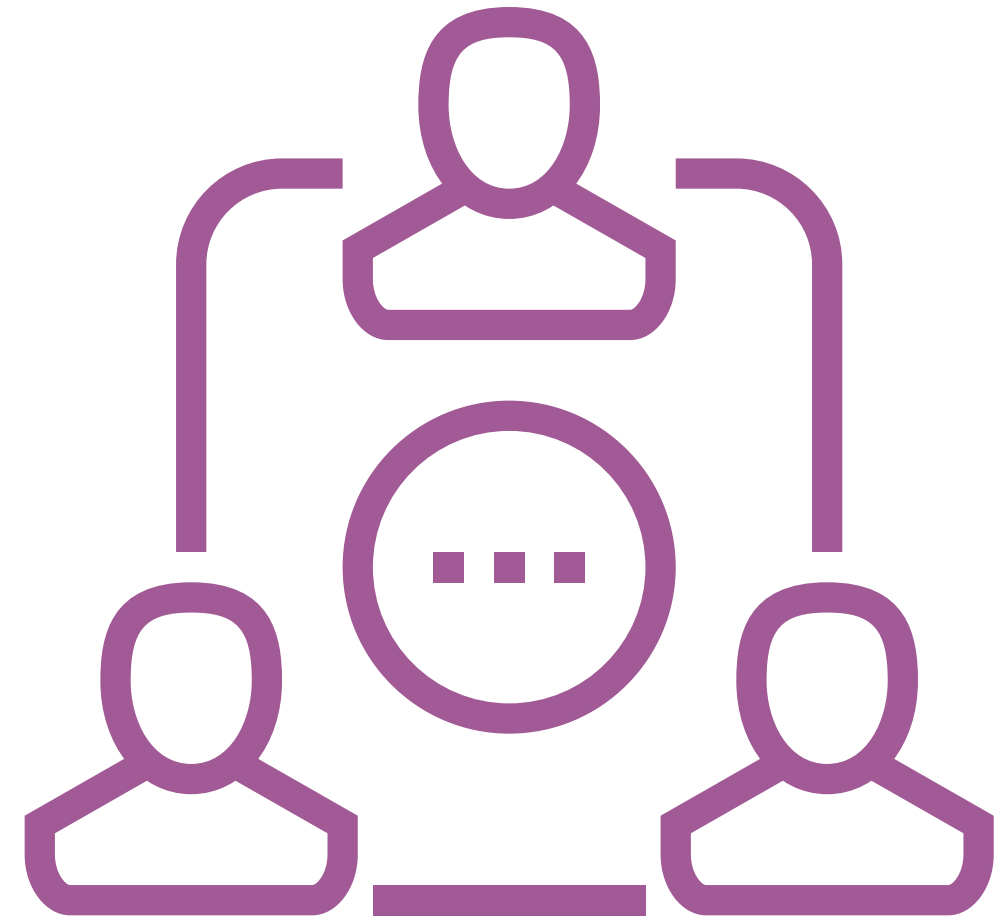
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Set Your Employee Recognition Strategy

Start with "Why"

No matter what you're creating, whether it's an employee benefits initiative, a new learning platform or a top-notch recognition program, you should always start your planning by defining your "why."

As Simon Sinek, author of "Start With Why," says, "When you start with 'why' in everything that you do, you inspire action in a way that 'what' doesn't."

The key to this is asking yourself: Why am I launching a recognition program, and what do I really want to achieve with it?

Whenever you're building something, you want to build with purpose. For instance, if you want to grow a garden, you wouldn't just plant a bunch of random flowers into the ground, would you? You'd research the soil, evaluate the sunlight, and create a plan by determining what you're trying to achieve. Likewise, for your recognition program, your starting point should always be to create a strategy based on exactly what you want to "grow." Here are some of the top reasons companies put recognition programs in place:

1. **Create a positive work environment.**

2. **Create a culture of recognition.**

3. **Motivate high performance.**

4. **Reinforce certain behaviours.**

So ask yourself, what am I trying to achieve and why? Discover this answer before you move on, so you wind up with a beautiful garden, and not just a field of weeds!

Building employee recognition into your employee engagement strategy

The best companies design jobs in a way which job design, learning and development, and recognition are included right from the start. Employee recognition should be a critical part of your overall employee engagement strategy. We've designed a 10-step model called the Engagement Bridge™ to increase employee engagement for more productive, innovative and committed employees. Here's a glimpse of how recognition fits into that model:

Learn more about the Bridge™ at **rg.co/thebridge**

# Does your organisation need employee recognition?

I believe that *every* company, no matter what size or what industry it's in, needs some kind of recognition program. The good news is that it doesn't have to be expensive. I once saw a company use simple Post-its as a way to recognise their workforce, but it does have to be a priority — 82% of employees surveyed by Gallup say **praise and recognition are leading factors** in helping them improve their job performance. If you don't have a recognition program, ask yourself, can my company afford not to have 82% of my workforce not at their peak performance?

How you design your recognition program will depend on your organisation's culture, values, business goals and the areas you're trying to improve. I've seen companies look into building recognition programs for many reasons, including some of these challenges:

- **Little to no knowledge of an organisation's purpose, mission or values.**

- **Low morale.**

- **Negative view of company culture.**

- **Low overall engagement score.**

- **An increase in unproductive employees.**

- **Little to no collaboration among teams or individual team members.**

By building a program with purpose, you'll have a better chance of addressing these challenges and introducing positive changes to both your people and your business.
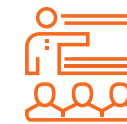
Did you know...

- **50%** of employees surveyed would **leave a company** if they weren't regularly thanked and recognised for their efforts. (Source: Reward Gateway survey, 2017)

- Peer-to-peer recognition is **36%** more likely to have a positive impact on financial results than manager-only recognition. (Source: SHRM)

- **54%** of employees feel their boss could do more to appreciate them. (Source: Reward Gateway survey, 2017)

Learn more at **rg.co/thankyou**

Create your recognition principles

Great, you've answered the critical "why" question, but sorry to say that this doesn't mean you can or should move on to designing your recognition program. At least, not just yet. You've got one more thing to do first, and that is to create your recognition principles. These help you define your program, what it stands for, what makes it unique and what it says to your employees and the external marketplace. Finding the right principles will help you create recognition programs which truly drive and support your "why," aligning with your company's mission, culture and values.

When designing your principles, I always suggest to start with your mission and values to ensure that your principles are strengthening your overall company vision.

Mission

Values

Recognition Principles
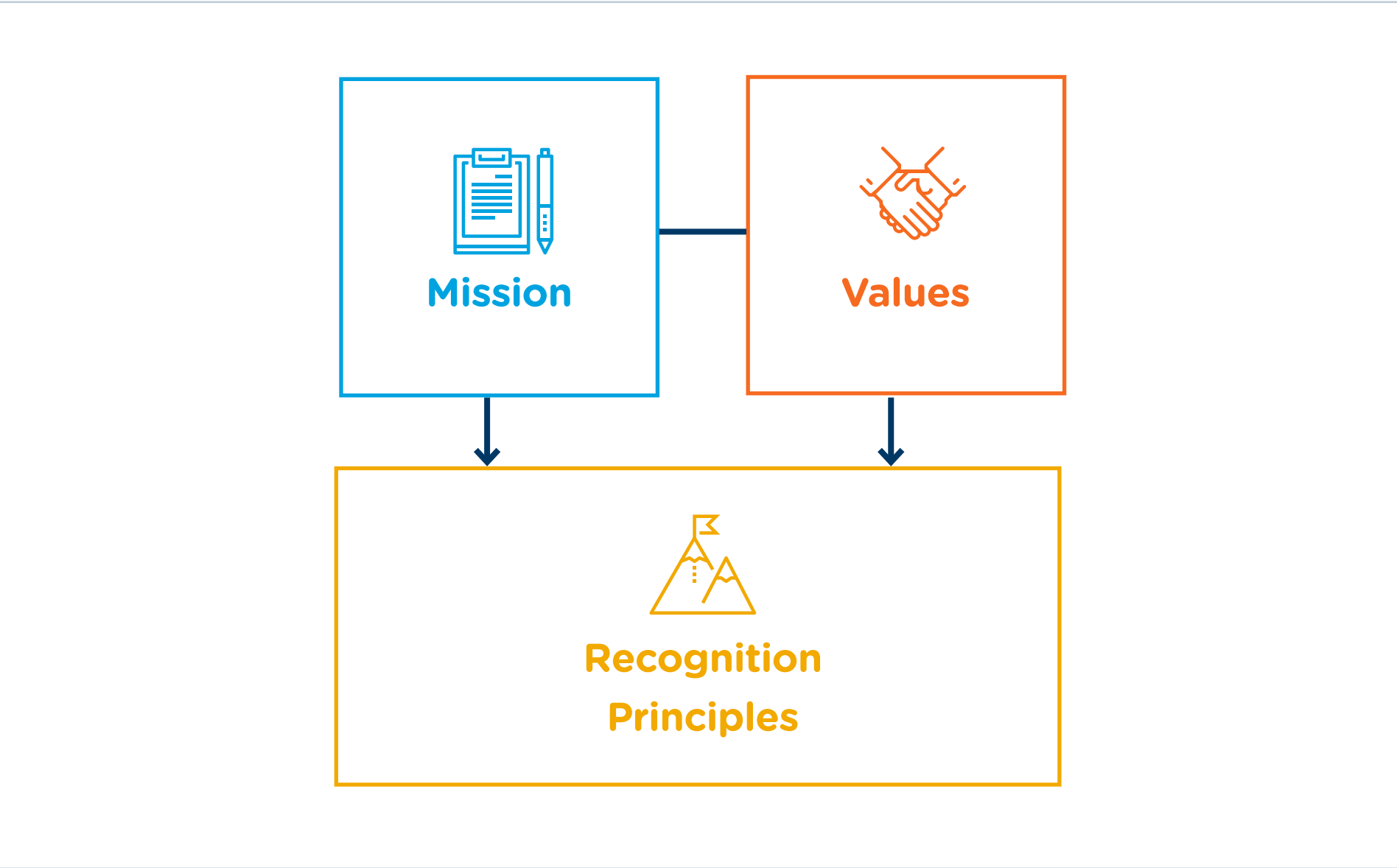
Using Reward Gateway as an example, here's how we've designed our mission, values and recognition principles to all fit and work together:

Mission:

Let's make the world a better place to work.

Values:

Love your job	Be human	Delight your customers	Work hard
Own it	Push the boundaries	Speak up	Think global

Recognition Principles:

Fairness	Balance	Wow	Easy
Give all employees the opportunity to recognise and be recognised.	Provide a range of recognition plans that recognise values in different ways.	Provide a recognition program that delights our employees.	Make recognition plans that are easy to understand and use.

Decide on the Details

Now it's time to roll up your sleeves and make the key decisions about your program. These are the nitty gritty details that answer the important questions of "what," "who" and "how." It's really important to list as many as possible to make sure you've thought of everything well in advance. Here are some examples:

What?

- How many different recognition plans will you have within your overall program (e.g. will you have one or create different plans to drive different objectives)?

- What recognition award(s) will be used (e.g. gifts, experiences, cash, or something else entirely)?

- What will you name your program and individual plans, and how will this align with other HR programs?

Who?

- Who will be able to send recognition?

- Who will be able to receive recognition?

- Who will administer the program?

How?

- What system(s) will you use to manage the program effectively?

- What processes will you put in place to ensure it runs smoothly?

- How and when will you measure the success of the program?

- What training will be developed and rolled out to ensure the program is understood?

These decisions will vary by company and by provider as all recognition programs are built differently. Company needs vary by size, industry, workforce and other factors, so it's important to take the time and think through these questions before moving on to the next step.

Whichever objectives and principles you select, double-check that they align and support your business goals and HR strategy. Finally, make sure you discuss these with your key decision makers and agree on them *before* you begin designing your program, as you want to ensure everyone has had a chance to contribute as well as set proper expectations.

Decide your "Say" and "Do"

A key part of answering the question "what" is deciding what your recognition program will "Say" and what it will "Do."

These are the actual moments of recognition that occur at times or events when you believe you should recognise your employees. They could be based on activities (e.g., joining the company, having a work anniversary or a birthday) or based on actions (e.g., helping a customer, helping a team member or suggesting a new way of doing things), or both.

The "Say"

is the message you want to convey to both the employee being recognised and the broader organisation.

Your "Say" could be...

- "Congratulations!"

- "We appreciate your hard work"

- "Thank you"

The "Do"

is the tangible reward you want to give to help recognise the employee's activity or action.

Your "Do" could be...

- eCards.

- Financial award.

- Posting their photo on the recognition wall.

Let's put it together...

Action or Activity	The "Say"	The "Do"
A colleague is navigating a challenging conversation and demonstrating company values to overcome objections.	Let them know what a great job they did in handling conflict at work.	Send them a values-based eCard.
An employee helps a customer solve a really tricky problem.	Congratulate them openly in the team huddle.	The manager gives the employee a monetary award.
A team spends the entire night working together to organise a launch party for the company.	Let them know how much you appreciate their hard work and how much it will help make the launch a success.	Treat the team to a night out on the town.

Of course, these examples are just the start of what your "Say" and "Do" approach might include. You may be surprised to hear a "Say" is sufficient for many actions or activities. Often we think we need to "Do" something in every situation, but in reality, employees appreciate the "Say" just as much, if not more, than the "Do." The key here is to be sure you make your employees feel recognised and appreciated, creating happy memories at the same time. The added benefit for your organisation is that the employee's happy memory and experience is now forever connected to your company, increasing your employee's overall positive perspective.

Match your brand and other initiatives. At Reward Gateway, we have an entire set of values-driven eCards that playfully reflect all our values.

Continuous recognition helps boost your "Say" and "Do"

By making your "Say" and "Do" moments more frequent, you can make continuous recognition a core part of your company culture. A recent survey from HRZone suggests that employee recognition isn't happening frequently enough:

> Over one-quarter of organisations do not have a formal recognition program.

At Reward Gateway, our suite of continuous recognition tools help you boost your number of "Say" and "Do" moments. These tools include peer-to-peer eCards that can be customised to match your brand and other objectives, monetary awards that have a finite pot of money attached so you can figure out how to budget appropriately, and the ability to nominate others at your company for whatever award or recognition action you feel is appropriate.

# Build Your Employee Recognition Program

Each organisation has its own strategy, so building your employee recognition program will similarly depend on a variety of factors including your size, demographic, budget, etc. Some programs will be very straightforward, with one recognition plan, while others may have multiple recognition plans.

The Recognition Pyramid approach

The next question you're probably asking yourself is, "how do you decide how many plans to include in your overall program?" An approach I've used in the past is a recognition "pyramid," which is a simple model to visualize who your recognition program reaches within your organisation. Here's how to build one:

**The Recognition Pyramid approach**
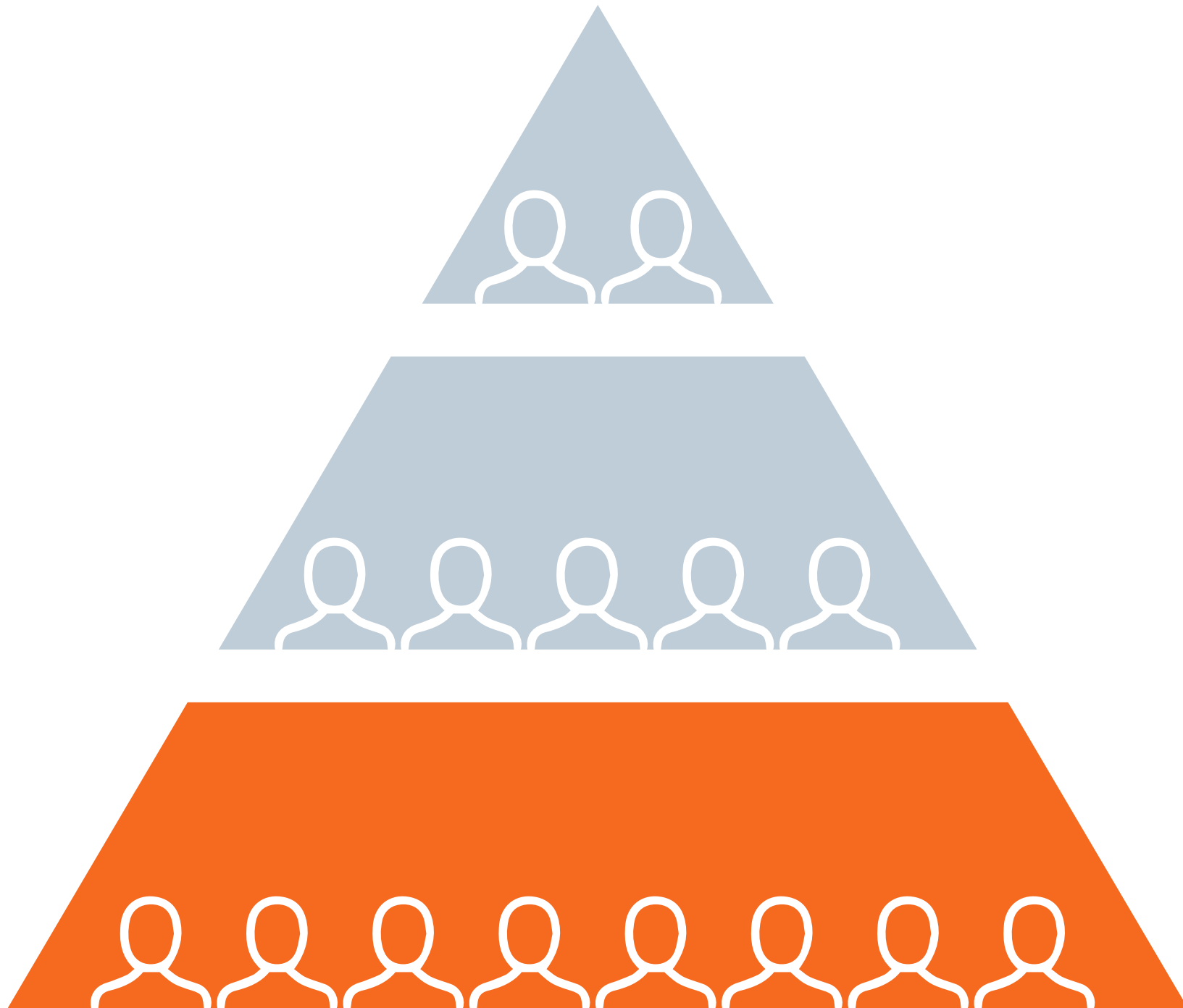
The **bottom section** of the pyramid, the widest part, is for what I call "anyone" and "anytime" recognition, so it touches the most employees and happens the most frequently. Many companies use this for plans that recognise all employees, and a common solution is peer-to-peer eCards (digital greeting cards you can send to anyone, at anytime). My colleagues at Reward Gateway can customise them to embed your brand, values and messaging to make recognition easy, and more frequent.
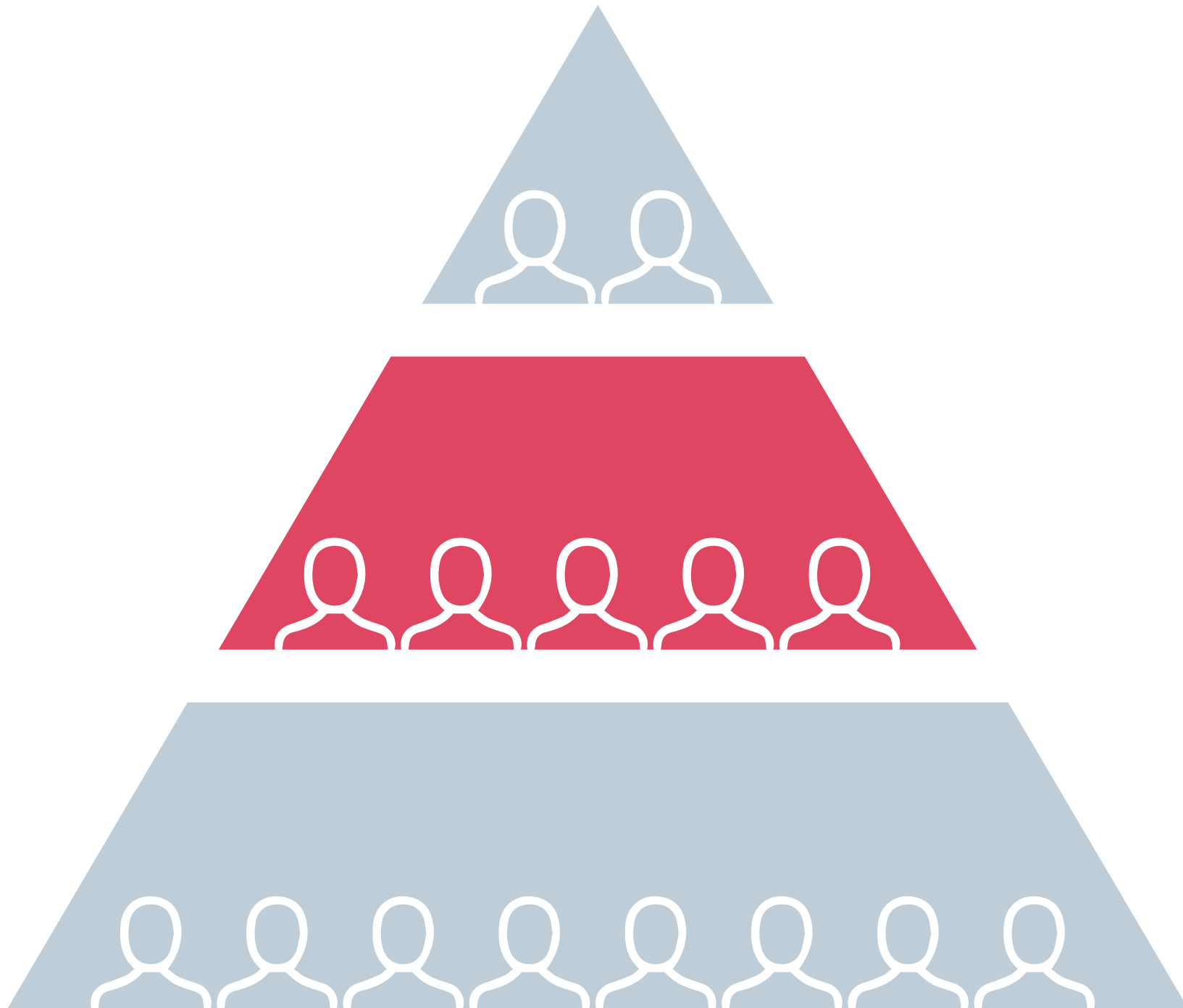
The **middle section** (you can have more than one!) of the pyramid is where you begin narrowing or reducing the number of employees who are recognised. This is often done as a way to highlight and recognise those employees whose actions and accomplishments have pushed the boundaries and/or they have gone above and beyond with their performance.

For this section, there are two common plans — manager awards and monthly/ quarterly awards. An example of the latter is when we used to host quarterly "Thank You" awards, in which employees would nominate their peers, a selection panel would choose the winners and then we'd announce them at all-staff business meetings.
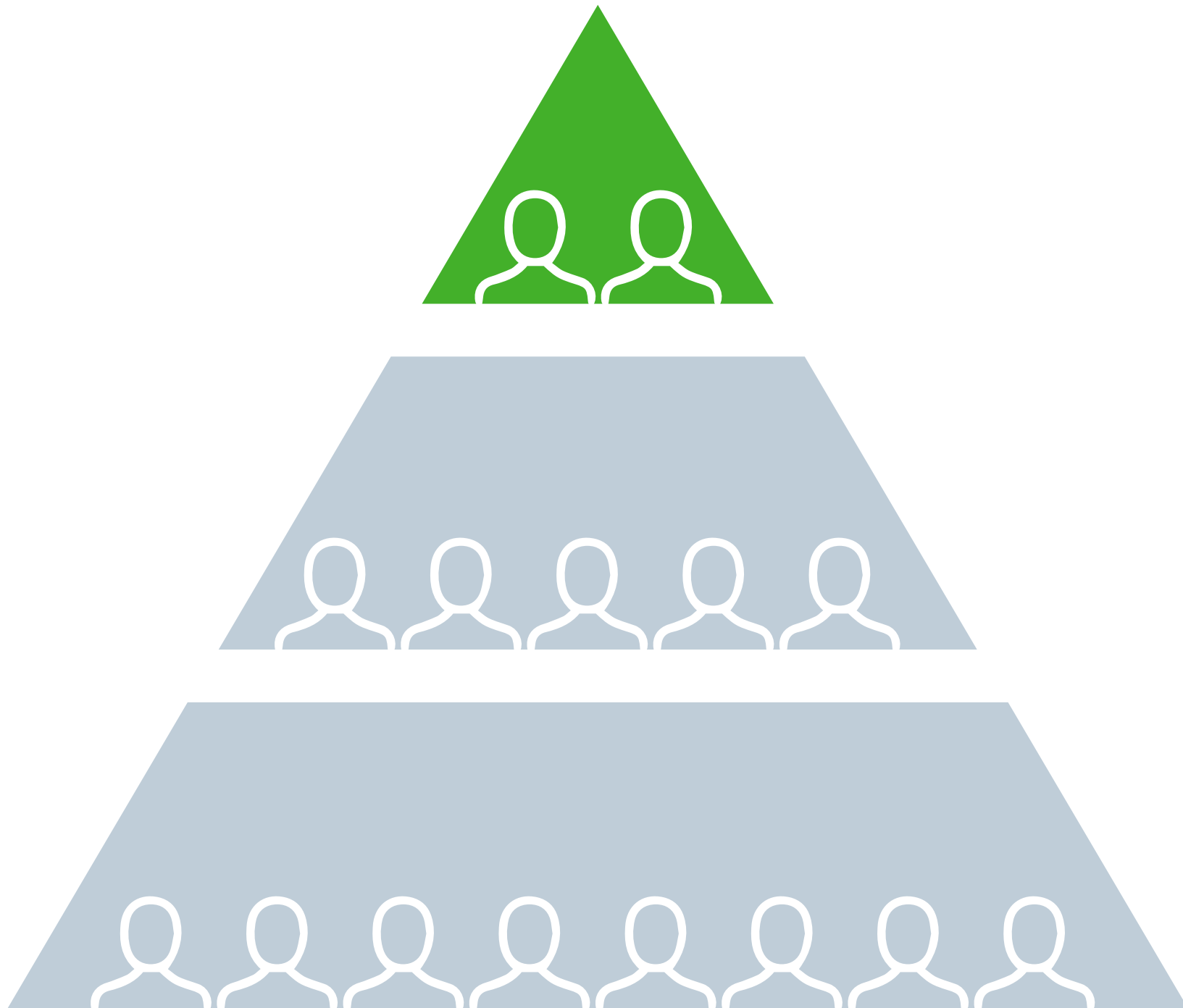
The **top section**, the narrowest section of the pyramid, is where your recognition program awards the best of the best, recognising exceptional performance. The most common plans for this are employee of the year programs or a CEO/leadership award.

There is no right or wrong number of plans, however, I suggest concentrating on all three kinds of tiers. If you focus only on the top tier, you may be missing out on the opportunity to recognise more of your staff and, ultimately, improve engagement. One other tip is to make sure each section of the pyramid is clearly defined as well as how it differs from the others, or you risk confusion, misuse and even disengagement.

To learn more about the pyramid and how to build your own, visit **rg.co/recpyramid** for other examples.

What's in a name?

One of the most important decisions you can make is **the name of your program.** The name will determine your overall brand and theme of the recognition program, and, of course, this is the name your employees will use over and over again as they engage with the program. Here are a few tips I've picked up to make sure your name will lead you to success:

1. Create meaning

by asking yourself if the name relates back to the program and if it's something your employees will engage with. For instance, one of the most popular names I've seen is "Star" because it immediately brings up the image of someone standing in the limelight for their achievements.

2. Make your name stand out

with an interesting (but easy to remember) word or phrase that will cut through the clutter of their inbox or other announcements, and will look fabulous on your engagement platform.

3. Keep the name simple

by making sure it can be easily pronounced and understood. Also keep in mind that not all words mean the same thing in all places, so this is especially important if you have a global workforce.

4. Think beyond the "now"

by selecting a name that can stand the test of time and be more evergreen.

5. Consider involving employees to help you name the program

You can create some extra buzz leading up to the launch and give employees a sense of ownership from the start by inviting individuals or teams to help come up with the name.

I've seen dozens of names over the years, but here are some that I find can be easily relatable in organisations of all shapes and sizes:

Recognition Program Names

Make sure your employee recognition program name has impact. Examples include:

Above & Beyond	Accolade	AllStars	Applause	Stand out	Star
Inspire	Kudos	Shine	Simply Thanks	Cheers	The Extra Mile

Adding MORE to your recognition program

In the latest revamp of Reward Gateway's own recognition program, we chose the name MORE! — **Moments of Recognition Everyday.**

M☺RE!
Moments of Recognition Everyday

The acronym MORE! sums up what we're trying to do, give more recognition. The individual words represent our aim to create recognition moments, which we believe are a key part of recognition, and to do it continually.

The new recognition program includes:

Peer-to-peer eCards:
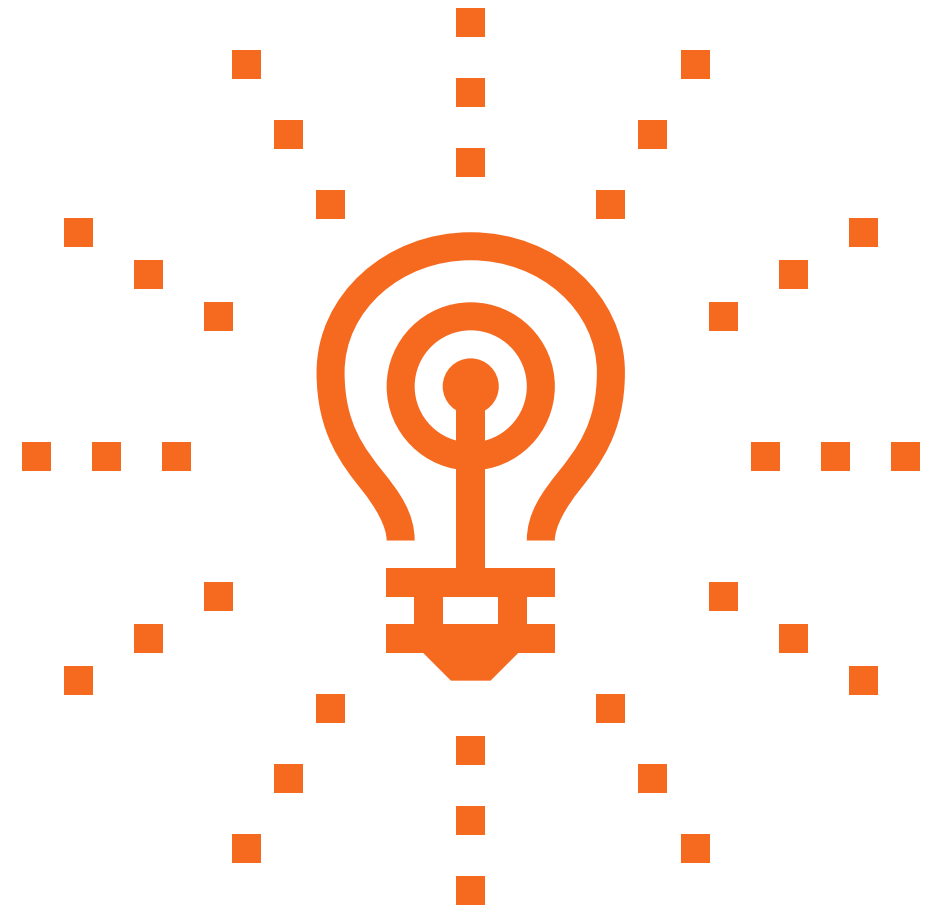
High Five

Peer-to-peer awards:

You Rock

Manager awards:

Game Changer

Leadership awards:

**LAA
(Leadership Amazing Awards)**

Shine a Spotlight on Your Plan

Now that you've developed your world-class recognition program, it's time to put the spotlight on recognition. Publicise your program with special spotlights that tell employees how great it is and how to use it, and add extra spotlights on those who are being recognised (if appropriate for your organisation). After all, they've done something worth recognising, so get out there and shout about it!

Here are a few particularly special spotlights to get you thinking…

Launch with impact.

As the expression goes, "You only get one chance to make a first impression!" That's definitely true when it comes to launching your recognition program — this will be your biggest opportunity to show employees how engaging and exciting your program will be.

To create some buzz, you could launch it with a fun video, create a teaser or countdown campaign, go on a recognition roadshow or do desk drops of branded material so it's always on view. The bigger the impact your recognition program has from the start, the more it will be remembered and used throughout your company on an ongoing basis.

Keep it alive.

Your recognition program, like all your people initiatives, should never be a "set it and forget it" play. You need to keep your program fresh, and a great way to do this is to shine a constant spotlight on it in new and different ways.

Here are a couple ways to do that:

- **Create a video montage of recognition moments.**

- **Post an interview with a recognition recipient.**

- **Run a value-of-the-month campaign to get employees talking and recognising each other based on the value.**

- **Create a competition to see who can send or receive the most recognition during a period of time.**

You can even use a recognition leaderboard to encourage a little friendly competition among employees. Whatever you do, find ways to keep it fresh and alive at your company.

Get social.

Everything we do these days is social, so why not consider adding a social aspect to your recognition program? At Reward Gateway, we use what we call the "Wow Wall," which is part of our employee recognition platform.

The way it works is that every time a colleague receives an eCard, it's automatically showcased to the rest of the company (if they choose to), and employees can like or comment on the recognition gesture, similar to the interactions on other social media platforms. Employees love it, and it helps us achieve the objectives of our program.

Incorporating features you see on social media puts the spotlight on the person being recognised, giving your entire workforce the opportunity to celebrate together and it subtly encourages your employees to recognise each other, as they're constantly reminded that you have a recognition program.

As your recognition program evolves, your spotlights will as well. The most important thing to remember is not to let it fade away, as you want recognition to remain a critical part of engaging your employees. That won't happen if no one knows about it!

Our peer-to-peer recognition program is available to anyone in the company. Browsing the Wow Wall filled with High Fives (eCards) is a great way to see what my colleagues are up to and celebrate wins, together.
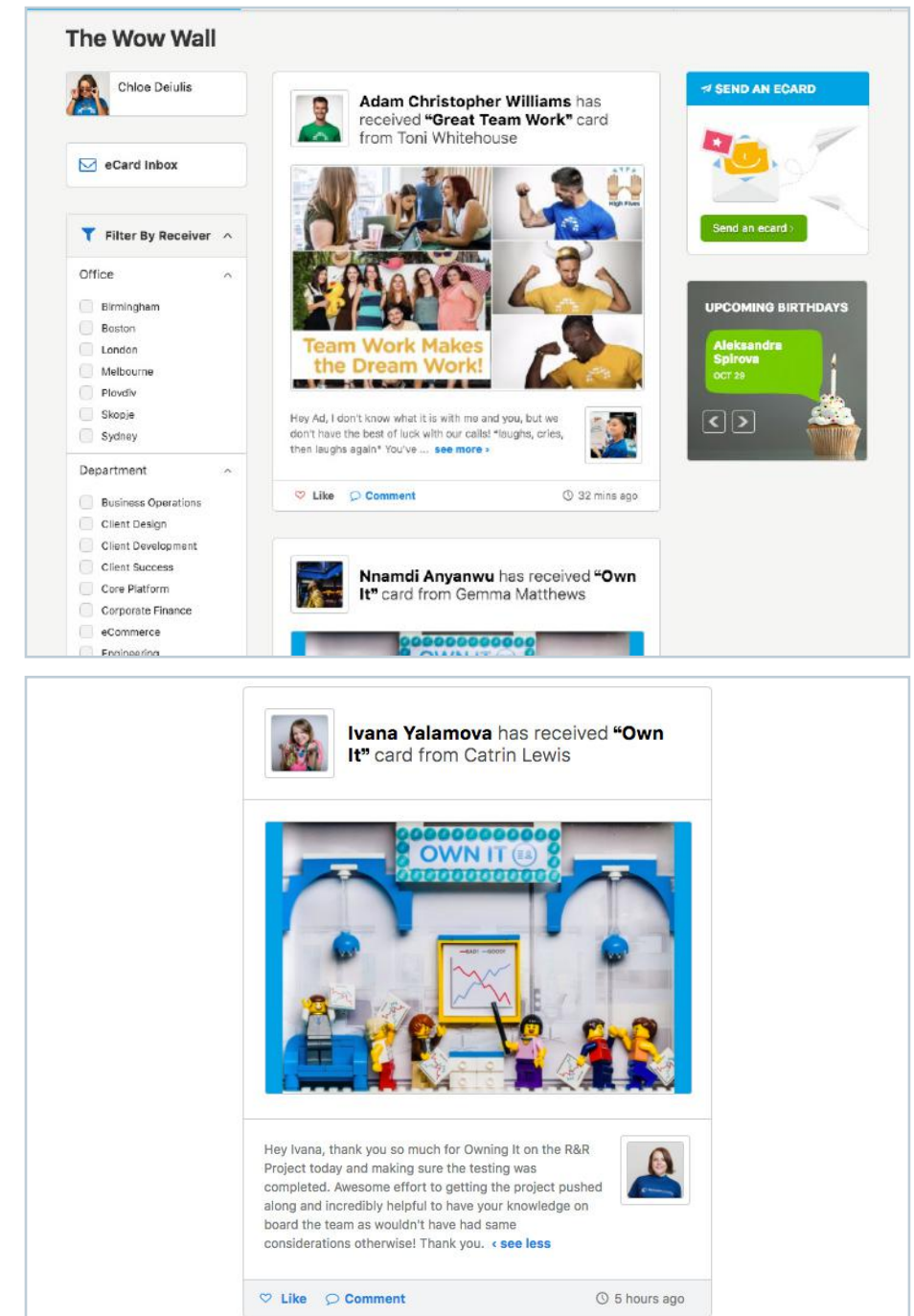
Measure Your ROI
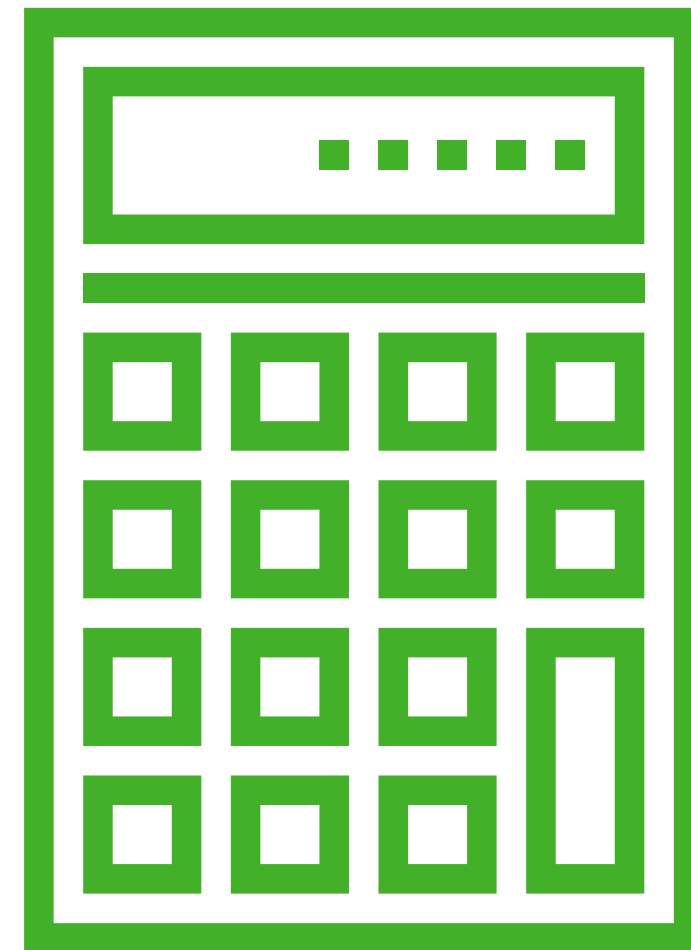
As part of your process, I'm sure you'll spend time talking to your leadership team and part of that discussion will inevitably be measuring the ROI (return on investment) on your program. To successfully do this, you need to pull from your original strategy and show that your program has accomplished the goals you've set out to achieve, and how. If you're working with a prospective provider, that provider may be able to give you examples of how their product worked for others or data points that will help prove your ROI.

Many companies paint this picture by reporting on changes in retention, profit, customer satisfaction and/or employee engagement, showing how they've increased as an indirect result of their recognition program. These are common business ROIs, and ones that business leaders will easily relate to and understand.

You may wish to measure other ROIs directly related to your recognition program, such as the following:
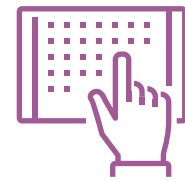
Program usage.

This measures interaction with the program and individual plans. It could include the number of eCards sent, the number of award nominations made, the amount of clicks on recognition stories, etc.

Social activity.

This also measures interaction with the program and plans, but is specific to social interaction. It could include the number of likes or comments employees are receiving or giving.
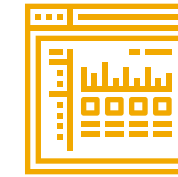
Anecdotes.

Never underestimate the power of a great story. Report specific stories and examples that highlight the value your program and plans are having with your workforce. These demonstrate the value of investment (VOI), as you won't have a hard measurement.

The key here is to select the right picture based on the right measurements, so that your business leaders will see the connection between your program and changes in these measurements. Make sure to test these with your leaders before measuring, so that you get it right from the start and don't spend time and resources preparing reports that serve no purpose.

Conclusion

I hope this guide has demonstrated the steps involved in launching an employee recognition program as part of your reward and recognition strategy. Remember that every organisation is unique and has different needs and capabilities, so the biggest tip I have is to customise your program for what's right for your business, and for your people.

As global leaders in employee engagement technology, including our employee recognition tools, Reward Gateway can help you on your path to building a world-class employee recognition program. You'll receive a dedicated Implementation Team and a Client Success Manager to help you with ongoing strategy and communication. Plus, we offer 24/7 support on our helpdesk for you — and your employees — to keep things running smoothly. Employee recognition and our other products

are powered by a centralised hub tailored to your organisation, making it easy to communicate recognition initiatives and drive high levels of engagement.

For more advice on how to successfully execute your employee engagement programs, including employee recognition, you can always find me on the Reward Gateway blog of engagement experts.

To better engagement (and more recognition!),

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Reward Gateway
the employee engagement people

Employee recognition and our other products are powered by a centralised hub tailored to your organisation, giving your employees better access to employee recognition tools.

If you're interested in learning more about any of Reward Gateway's recognition and engagement products to help attract, retain and engage your people, we'd love to help you get started.

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