



The Healthcare  
**Employee  
Recognition  
Playbook**

## Summary

Organizations are only as effective and successful as their employees, and nowhere is this truer than in healthcare. People who choose to work in the healthcare field are, by nature, caring, compassionate individuals who are devoted to helping others. Retention of these invaluable employees is critical, yet that is no simple task — especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cases of burnout have become far too common, and turnover is extraordinarily high. Perhaps more than at any other time, healthcare employees at all levels need to know they are valued and appreciated. Of the many ways this can be accomplished, formal employee recognition programs are some of the most valuable.

In this Employee Recognition Playbook, we will cover the following:

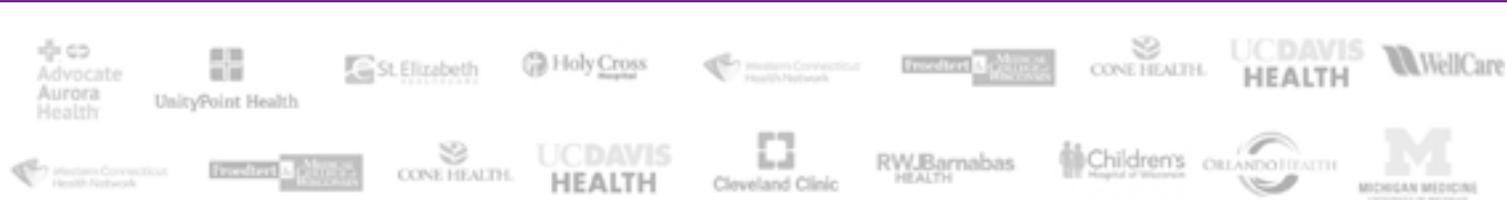


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## About WorkStride

WorkStride serves enterprise companies as a leading provider of reward and recognition programs within the healthcare sector. Our blend of award-winning technology, expert consultative design service, and industry-leading support has positioned WorkStride as a top provider and subject matter expert in healthcare recognition and patient satisfaction. With more than 150 enterprise healthcare clients, like Advocate Aurora Health, Orlando Health, Cleveland Clinic, AETNA, and Cone Health, WorkStride has cultivated a wealth of insight into the unique nuances of what makes recognition successful within the modern healthcare system. We look forward to sharing some of that insight with you through this resource.



## Why Recognize?

### People Need Recognition

Companies throughout the world have learned the extraordinary value of employee recognition programs to reward and retain their staff, as well as to attract new employees. Within the healthcare industry, where success is largely dependent on the quality of care provided by staff, the significance and impact of recognition becomes even greater.

Today, healthcare networks face [unprecedented challenges](#), including hospitals filled to capacity, rising demands for quality of care, and limited resources — while at the same time grappling with historically low operating budgets and costs that continue to rise. Although enhancing employee recognition is by no means a cure-all for these formidable challenges, more and more leading hospital systems are adopting formal programs in an effort to retain employees and keep productivity flowing.



## SATISFIED CAREGIVERS MEANS SATISFIED PATIENTS

The purpose of caregiver recognition is not only to support staff, but also patients — and the two goals are closely aligned. The quality of care provided to patients depends on engaged and motivated caregivers. While regular interactions with patients can be rewarding for many healthcare workers, the stressful nature of the work can still wear them down. This is especially true in times of heightened capacity and sudden surges, which may require more intense care without additional resources.

Caregiver satisfaction directly affects quality of care. A typical [15 percent increase in patient safety](#) occurs when a healthcare team is highly engaged. This has a direct impact on [patient satisfaction](#) — and that, in turn, has a direct effect on HCAHPS ratings.



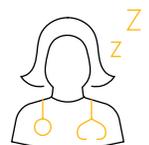
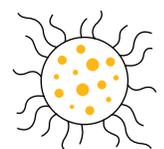
*Credit: Kevin Kruse, Forbes*

## THE HARSH REALITY OF BURNOUT

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, healthcare employee burnout became a major issue. Most everyone in healthcare was affected by this, but nurses were hit especially hard. Surveys have shown that during the height of the pandemic, nurses experienced an increase in emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment, leading to lower productivity levels.

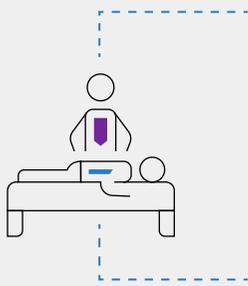
Dr. Redonda Miller, president of Johns Hopkins Hospital, says nurses worked extended shifts, sometimes working 24 hours a day in uncomfortable personal protective equipment, while worrying about their own exposure to COVID. He says that **making sure healthcare employees know how valued and appreciated they are can help them cope with the stress of their jobs and possibly avoid burnout.** As Miller said during a [U.S. News webinar](#):

“It’s not the sole answer — I know that — but it helps.”



## THE HIGH COSTS OF HEALTHCARE TURNOVER

Healthcare market analysts at *Becker's Hospital Review* report that turnover in the healthcare vertical is bad, with only hospitality being worse. This problem comes with a cost. Physician turnover alone can reach as high as \$1 million per role, according to an article in [Recruiting Physicians Today](#).



*The average cost of turnover for a bedside RN is*

**\$40,038.**

*This results in the average hospital losing between*

**\$3.6m – \$6.5m** per year

*to churn replacement cost.*



↓ **DOWNLOAD REPORT**

Hospital employee turnover rates have increased and are significantly higher than in other occupations. While turnover rates of different roles within the healthcare sector vary, many signal dramatically high rates, with some roles edging over 35 percent. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the average turnover rate in the U.S. is about 13 percent — which places healthcare in dramatic terrain.

Some specific examples: Turnover rates for certified nursing assistants (CNAs) have recently been 27.7 percent; physician assistants (PAs) have seen a 14.2 percent turnover rate; and the turnover rate for patient care techs (PCTs) has been 19.3 percent.

*The lack of recognition and engagement contributes significantly to employee turnover. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, at least 90 percent of HR professionals believe recognition and reward influence employees to stay in their jobs.*

## ATTRACTING STAFF IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Along with efforts to retain employees, healthcare systems must make a concerted effort to attract new employees — and in today's competitive healthcare market, that is especially challenging. Employment opportunities for nurses are projected to grow 15 percent faster than all other occupations through 2026 — which the BLS says will warrant roughly 11 million additional nurses in the market to avoid a shortage.

*According to the American Nurses Association, there will be more registered nurse jobs available through the end of 2022 than any other profession in the United States.*

It behooves leading hospital systems to invest in becoming more attractive to talented employees in a competitive marketplace. Part of this means understanding the concerns that are prevalent with healthcare candidates — including a lack of recognition and appreciation. Formal employee recognition programs can help alleviate this concern among potential job candidates.



*One of the leading causes of employees transitioning to a similar role at a new organization involves a lack of recognition and appreciation. Gallup reports that those who claim to be engaged at work make up only about 30% of the overall workforce.*

# Objectives

## The CARES Concept

Once the need for a recognition program is established, where do you begin? From group outings to bonus days off to employee of the month designations to special appreciation events, there are innumerable ways to let employees know they are valued and appreciated. In terms of formal recognition programs, we suggest thinking in terms of **CARES**: **C**elebrate, **A**cknowledge, **R**eward, **E**ngage, **S**urvey. These are cornerstones of some of the most successful employee recognition programs in healthcare.



## CELEBRATE

Providing an environment where activities can be shared, celebrated, and reinforced in a communal setting raises morale and contributes to a more inclusive culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGE

Spotlighting individuals for their specific behaviors is a core component of any successful recognition program. When a behavior is recognized by a peer, manager, or patient, the employee is motivated to perform even better.

## REWARD

Surveys have shown again and again that employees believe management should reward them for a job well done when the particular action occurs. This encourages future behaviors that align with rewards.

## ENGAGE

More than periodic acknowledgement, employees need a continuous stream of engagement that can include recognition, as well as other forms like, communication, training, cultural activities, and encouragement of social interaction among peers.

## SURVEY

Promoting a positive culture and workplace is more than doing; it's also encouraging and listening to what employees say. By collecting and analyzing their feedback, employers learn what employees think could be done better to ensure their success and happiness at work. Feedback provided in surveys directly correlates to employee engagement and to the success of recognition programs.



# Strategy

## Successful Strategies for Hospital Recognition

So how can you put the CARES concept to work for your healthcare organization? WorkStride has studied some of the country's leading healthcare systems and learned how they manage recognition, engagement, retention, and attraction within their organizations. As you review the following initiatives that are common in leading recognition programs, you'll notice CARES factors woven in.



### MILESTONES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The cornerstone of a successful healthcare recognition program is the nomination, acknowledgment and reward of organizational achievements. While traditional milestones recognized in most organizations align with tenure (commonly referred to as Service Awards), great engagement programs go further; they incorporate more opportunities to recognize individual and team behaviors that occur on a daily basis throughout the organization.



#### **Service Awards**

Service Awards programs are a long-standing part of recognition programs at leading hospitals. Years of service within healthcare is a great value to the organization, as replacement costs and burdens for employees can be extreme. While not all employees stick around for the long haul, large hospital systems do see some highly tenured staff — WorkStride programs have recognized some folks with more than 50 years on the job. So it's important that great tenure is recognized and even showcased if appropriate.

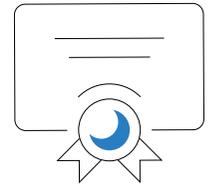
The design for Service Awards should go beyond tiers; it should be exciting and engaging. Sometimes there are creative names, themes, or specific award titles for each level.

Rewards relevancy is also an important factor to consider in Service Awards. For example, a 50-year employee will expect a bit more than a certificate or virtual recognition compared with a five-year employee. A mix of both values and reward types can be considered (e.g., plaques,

trophies, pins) and/or monetary value in the form of payroll, gift cards, or Visas.

### REWARDABLE CHALLENGES

With a formal recognition program, any behavior the organization wants to recognize can be supported. From the use of non-monetary thank you awards to monetized awards spotlighting specific behaviors, our platform is flexible and supportive.



Most of our healthcare clients have created a balanced award structure. This enables peers to show gratitude toward each other on a daily basis, and also incorporates a blend of awards that offer small monetary incentives for achievements such as above-and-beyond efforts, an increase in patient satisfaction, and positive patient feedback, among others.

Challenges can be simple or rather complex. Consider getting advanced with custom rule structures, audience segmentation and personalization, and dashboards/leaderboards to stream results in a fun and interactive manner.

### HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

It's important to employees that organizations acknowledge and celebrate special occasions. These celebratory activities offer hospitals an opportunity to thank staff for all their hard work, and can create a stronger sense of community within your organization.

Within WorkStride client recognition programs, many hospitals leverage holidays as well as



employee birthdays as opportunities to show appreciation to employees.

Recognizing employees with a holiday or birthday gift is a common practice within our healthcare programs. The platform allows a seamless, efficient solution in support of these special, and meaningful gifts.

Additional gifting opportunities that are common in our healthcare recognition programs involve important industry designations, such as Nurses Week, Healthcare Employee Appreciation Week, and others.

### SPOT RECOGNITION

It's also important to highlight regular occurrences within an organization; although this often happens behind the scenes, it is critical to the development of a recognition culture. Normal recognition for great activities helps foster a highly engaged culture, and creates the likelihood the recognized employees will repeat the positive behavior.

During the pandemic, some of our customers used our platform to send Uber Eats and Starbucks to facilitate remote team lunches



*Spot Recognition awards give managers (and in some cases peers) the ability to immediately recognize employees for staying late, covering extra shifts, or other above-and-beyond efforts.*

and coffee breaks.

## **SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND ENGAGEMENT**

In the not-so-distant past, all recognition and engagement programs were “offline” since “online” didn’t yet exist. Today, software has modernized recognition programs to add a social media-like experience — without the ubiquitous memes and fiery political posts.

Social Recognition refers to the peer-to-peer nature of a recognition program. It allows employees to share in the recognition of their peers by liking and commenting on their rewards. Many of WorkStride’s client programs use *Social Stream*, which enables employees to acknowledge and engage with one another on a daily basis. These daily interactions create a sense of community that can sometimes be lacking in organizations where campuses are geographically distant.

## **FEEDBACK COLLECTION AND TRACKING**

There are myriad ways to assess and improve a company and its culture, and collecting employee feedback is one of the most effective ways to start. You can incorporate questions into your employee survey, employee reviews, new hire training, and/or manager training on what they want to see in a recognition program. This will lay the groundwork for the organization to understand how to make the program successful.

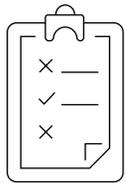
Tracking results will be critical to the evolution of your program, and our reporting suite will give you access to all program activities. Identifying lags in usage by department, role, and function gives insight into challenges within a specific segment.

One of our WorkStride clients used our reports to identify a training issue with English as a second language employees. They didn’t know how to log in to the platform because the training communications were hosted in English. Our reports showed that these employees



had received recognition but were unable to log in; once identified, the organization was able to pinpoint the individuals and communicate directly with them.

Challenges occur within organizations, and often they get missed. Intuitive



reporting gives you insight and opportunities to identify and surmount those hurdles.

### EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

Surveying employees is a critical component for improving culture. Feedback can illuminate challenges and fuel positive change and greater employee satisfaction. However, it can be challenging to convince busy staff to participate. Catching employees when they are in the right mindset helps to ensure a good response rate. You can leverage your recognition program by incorporating communications around surveys, reminders, or even pulse surveys within the program design.

For a more comprehensive survey strategy, you can conduct an internal survey campaign with the employee base. WorkStride provides this to clients as an



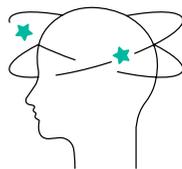
added service offering in order to ensure that employee attention is captured.

### PROGRAM FEEDBACK

Feedback on the company, culture, and leadership is incredibly valuable. But remember to ask about your recognition program itself; do employees feel it's useful and simple to use? Are the rewards inspiring? The insight directly from program users can

result in a meaningful list of improvements to tackle with your team and program provider.

An important measurement in determining the success of your recognition program is creating a baseline. If only 20 percent of your population feel they are being recognized, we can work together to track and increase your scores. As your partner in recognition through data sharing and collaboration,



we can create a recognition program that exceeds your employees' expectations.

### PATIENT SATISFACTION

Gathering feedback from employees can benefit them, while gathering patient feedback can improve the patient experience. After all, the ultimate goal of every healthcare provider is to offer the best possible care to patients.

Reaching out to patients and asking them about their experience is critical to how a recognition program's structure will be developed and utilized. High-scoring positive patient experience pays dividends. Positive patient satisfaction ratings lead to higher reimbursement levels from insurance providers.

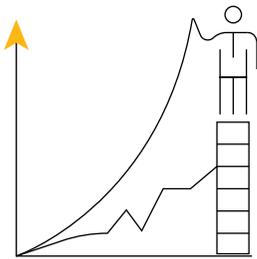
*By giving patients a voice and allowing them the opportunity to recognize the caregiver(s), custodian, nurse, or valet parking attendant who made their experience rewarding, the moment is experienced, recognized, and*

# Results

## Success Measurement

Measuring success is a must for modern recognition programs. Success extends beyond the obvious program activity and into performance indicators to the overall company and culture; like retention, employee satisfaction, patient satisfaction, and productivity, among others.

There are two important key categories of value that every healthcare leader should consider as they think about what success looks like: results in the form of *creating value* and results in the form of *saving cost*.



## VALUE CREATION

Measuring the value of a recognition program is an exercise of determining what performance indicators are showing an increased result compared to the past, and what positive attributes exist that were not there before.

### *Engagement / Productivity*

One of the most common ways of assessing the success of a recognition program is measuring engagement. Often, this is a bit of a wild goose chase, as “engagement” is a rather nebulous concept. What is it? And how do you measure it?

The answer is ... there are many answers. Engagement could be program usage like logins or recognitions sent. Engagement could be a qualitative buzz in the culture and feelings of improvement. And engagement could be productivity and measures of patient output and satisfaction. While there is no right answer in how “engagement” is defined, it’s important to consider both the “leading” indicators and “lagging” indicators.

Leading indicators of engagement are activities that can lead to future movement toward a result. For example, more program recognitions sent will likely lead to more engagement within the culture. Also important, however, are the lagging indicators, which measure the results of those leading actions. These indicators can be seen and measured in program activity data.

Lagging indicators are the output — factors such as qualitative feedback (words that express whether things are or aren’t working well) or measured productivity (actions that represent good business health, like the number of patients seen or tasks completed).

*Organizations that measure up to highly engaged employees report up to 22 percent higher productivity than ones that don’t.*

### ***Patient Satisfaction and HCAHPS***

Another force of quality measurement within a healthcare system is contained in words from the patient. Direct links are made between healthcare company culture and patient experience. So, if patient experience is measuring high, it indicates that the staff providing them with good service has healthy work engagement.

While hospitals often conduct their own patient satisfaction research, there is also of course the national standardized version of HCAHPS. It serves as an instrument to collect feedback from patients on their hospital experiences and publish a resulting rating for public visibility. These scores impact a hospital's bottom line in two ways. One is a low score potentially damaging the reputation of a hospital among future potential patients and employment candidates. The other is even more direct in financial impact, as low HCAHPS scores can limit the amount of funding received from Medicare.

Measurements of your company's feedback, ratings, and scores tell you (often literally) how successful the endeavors of cultural engagement are going.

### ***Talent Attraction***

Success in cultural improvement can be measured by how much talent your organization is attracting and retaining. Great, engaged cultures result in good word of mouth, positive press, and employee referrals to their contacts. One effective way of keeping a pulse on improvements is measuring recruitment KPIs. How many candidates are filling out applications for new job postings? How quickly are those jobs being filled?

These drivers can tell an impactful story about your organizational culture, and improving the resulting overtime can showcase positive cultural change. Another important indicator is how many times these high potentials are being recognized. One study reported that 75 percent of high potentials were more likely to be retained if they had received recognition; it didn't matter what type or level of recognition they received, only that they had been recognized.

### **COST SAVINGS**

Assessing organizational cost is the other side of success measurement. Unlike value creation, which assesses drivers of positive change, cost savings measures value through the reduction of certain costs that can be mitigated with good culture and engagement. Fostering an engaged workforce helps relieve the burden of overcompensating fallout of disengagement.



### **Medical Mistake Reduction**

It might sound like a stretch, but fostering rewards and recognitions can actually lead to reduced medical mistakes and lower patient mortality.

According to research, approximately 400,000 hospitalized patients experience some type of preventable harm each year, resulting in about 100,000 deaths. The cost associated with these preventable errors is believed to be roughly \$20 billion annually.

While it's wrong to claim that employee engagement is the cure to these issues, it's reasonable to suggest that healthcare workers who are happier, more engaged, and more productive at work will experience fewer of these issues than others.



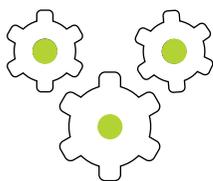
### **Retention**

As previously discussed, the average hospital is believed to be losing between \$3.6m and \$6.5m per year to employee replacement costs. While these costs will never conceivably go down to \$0, they can be significantly decreased through better retention of existing employees and kicking up employee referrals from an engaged workforce.

### **New Patients**

In business, an important measure of an organization's success is new sales. While numerous factors can drive or prevent sales, new customers are a factor of a successful company. In healthcare, new patients are the equivalent measure. While outside forces exist, a more engaged workforce, more productive staff, and more satisfied patients are natural drivers of new patient visits. Positive word of mouth, coupled with discoverable reviews and ratings, and perhaps some good buzz in the press can lead to patients trusting your facilities over others. In some cases, trust has led to ill individuals seeking medical attention versus an alternative of self-care, as well as increases in elective procedures.

# Optimization



## Good to Great Methods

The pursuit of driving success never ends. That's why optimization and improvements are an imperative piece of the equation for all successful healthcare recognition programs. The following are the top five factors to ensure consistent, increasing success of your recognition programs.

### *Diversifying the Reward Mix*

People love choices. That applies to consumers shopping for paint at their local Home Depot, drivers checking out new cars at a dealership, and employees participating in their hospital's recognition program.

Choice goes beyond the diversity offered within a single reward category. For instance, **WorkStride client programs offer 300+ retail gift card options**. Redeemers can choose from the most general (Amazon) to the most specific (Roblox). But mixing up the reward assortment beyond gift cards helps to generate more excitement in the program.

While recognition programs aren't all about rewards, the redemption options are influential in motivating engagement and program participation. For example, adding merchandise to a gift card only selection keeps things interesting. The browsing experience of merchandise shopping with rewards adds a new flavor to the program that's less transactional than gift cards. Conversely, introducing gift cards to a merchandise-only program provides more flexibility with endless possibilities of what reward dollars can lead to.

As another example, a five-year Service Award might include a certificate, a nice message, and an engraved plaque. For a 10- or 20-year work anniversary, along with the common symbolic award, there could be some reward value to use for a gift.



### *Adding New and Interesting Award Types*

One to increase the value of a recognition program is by recognizing more company behaviors with a greater number of award types.

Award types are branded recognitions in the program used for acknowledging a specific action. For some health systems, the award types are reflective of their core values, with one award representing each value. Going beyond involves introducing even more values to the program in recognition of activities like wellness, safety, and training behaviors.

Hoping that employees will invest more in personal wellness challenges like annual checkups or weekly step counts? You could offer an award for that. Wishing employees would practice more safe daily activities within their facilities, or participate in a non-mandatory module? There could be awards for those too.

The more award types introduced into the program design, the more the program will be remembered and utilized. And, even better, the more those values and behaviors behind each award will be regularly displayed within the culture.

### ***Integrating Platforms***

In a world of increasing utilization of technology in healthcare, there are more opportunities to unblur lines between business tools to benefit both participants of recognition programs and their administrators — and they go beyond expected HRIS integration.

Many health systems that run a recognition program, for instance, also run a company-wide intranet. Given the centralized nature of both platforms, some programs provide a seamless experience between the two, by linking the recognition program in the navigation of the intranet (and vice versa) and leveraging Single-Sign-On (SSO) technology to enable one single login across both networks.

**Some WorkStride client programs integrate the recognition program with a hospital's rounding software.** This enables supervisors to log observations of positive, recognition-worthy activities of staff, and have those

logs lead to recognition and reward in the company's recognition program.

### ***Ensuring Leaders Are Spending Their Budgets***

Once you've gone through the undertaking of creating and launching a program, and have gotten valuable reward budgets in the hands of managers and supervisors to give out to their employees, you may find that some managers aren't issuing out rewards.

This could be because those budget-holders simply don't observe enough positive behavior, or more likely, they've been so immersed in daily work that their reward budgets have taken a backseat. Formal programs like those created by WorkStride give you visibility into budget-holders, so you can monitor how much they've spent relative to their allocated rewards.

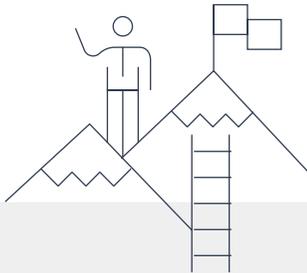
Finding that some leaders or divisions are underutilizing their reward budgets is valuable information. Budget-holders can be reminded and contacted about their hoarded budgets. Further, the intel can provide insights about that leader or the division. What's driving the lack of activity? Once identified, how can it be addressed?

### ***Marketing the Program***

If you've got a great program, market it! So many good programs that are underutilized lead to the belief that improvement in the program design is needed, when actually, more communication about the program may be what's needed. Make a splash beyond



just the initial launch. Weave the program into regular communications and newsletters. Encourage leaders to leverage the program to drive engagement with their staff. The methods of internal communication of a great program are endless, and can spark a large increase in program activity.



### A Few Final Words

There is no shortage of methods and techniques to use in the overall design of a winning employee recognition program at your healthcare organization. As we have been a recognition partner working with hospitals for more than 20 years, WorkStride is here to help. **Through a winning blend of technology, expertise, services, and support, WorkStride doesn't just give you a boilerplate program; we support you as we work together to strategize, design, build, launch, communicate, improve, and deliver an employee recognition and engagement solution that's right for you.** Contact us to learn more about how our unique healthcare solutions provide companies with the tools that they need to achieve their goals and beyond.

### How We Help



Program Design & Strategy



Implementation & Build



Launch & Communication



Consulting & Optimization



Services & Support

### Ready to get started?

To learn more or to schedule a demo, please visit [workstride.com](http://workstride.com)

