

The Australian Talent & Engagement Report

7 strategies to turn the tide on attraction, retention and productivity in 2024



This report is presented by

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Australian workplaces: They are a-changin’

Disrupted office culture, shifting work modalities and evolving employee needs have been the norm over the last few years. We’ve witnessed what feels like decades of change compressed into years or even months. With so much pressure and uncertainty in the air, it’s no surprise that so many business leaders are walking with trepidation as everyone tries to plan for the future.

There’s a lot of uncharted water to navigate, including:

- Helping Australians navigate cost of living increases
- Shifting rights and responsibilities around wellbeing
- Return-to-work planning and designing remote, hybrid and in-office work to maintain a strong company culture

- Increasing productivity and growth targets to support our economy
- Growing demands for hyper-personalisation in both our personal and professional lives

Over these crucial years, Reward Gateway has been keeping our finger on the pulse of workplace trends and developments annually to help HR leaders focus their finite energies and efforts.

Our recent survey of 1,000 employees and 1,000 HR decision-makers across Australia revealed the nuances of what’s working now, what’s not, what employees want and don’t want and what HR managers are doing to engage them.

Amongst the findings, three key insights stood out as critical focus areas for HR and business leaders:

- 1** Business leaders and hiring managers who are serious about **increasing productivity** at the company, industry and national level are increasing investment in programs that address employee dissatisfaction and disengagement.
- 2** As the **rising cost of living** has impacted employees across all generations in different ways, leading employers are revisiting and repackaging their total rewards offering to ensure employees receive a wide range of support to improve their financial, physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.
- 3** While **fair pay** remains the top of many employees’ ‘must-have’ list, there are a number of elements in the employee experience that many people value more than a 10% increase in their salary: Culture, connection and strong manager-employee relationships provide opportunities for employers with limited budgets.

This report offers an analysis of the survey results to help you end 2023 strong and launch into 2024 with the confidence and resolve you need to engage, advocate for and retain employees.

This year, one trend has stood out: employee expectations are shifting.

While this may have always been the case, with unemployment hitting record lows, employees are now more open to new opportunities if they aren’t getting what they’re looking for, or are dialling down their discretionary effort if they aren’t feeling sufficiently supported. This evolution has kept employers on their toes when it comes to competing for and retaining top talent and improving overall productivity – talent retention and engagement is no longer just an HR issue, but an issue for all business leaders to solve.



The cost of remuneration in Australia has increased over the past five years, but our productivity hasn't improved at an equivalent rate. Leaders are increasingly looking at how to improve employee engagement so they can maximise the performance and productivity of their current teams and build a strong workforce over the long term.

**Kylie Green, Managing Director,
Reward Gateway**

Employers are making it clear: Talent is the top priority

It's likely every member of your C-suite has felt the pain of the bottom line cost of unwanted attrition. More and more executives are seeing talent attraction and engagement as the key to unlocking scalable productivity and growth. Our survey results reveal that 68% of HR leaders are planning to increase their investment in hiring, onboarding, communication, recognition and reward, benefits and learning and development. This renewed focus on the levers that influence employee retention comes as no surprise, since 70% of employers are concerned about employees quitting – even more than in 2022, with medium-sized organisations the most concerned at 77%.¹ Perhaps we're still reeling from The Great Reshuffle in 2021, when a whopping one in five Australians quit their job,² or we may be adjusting to the fact that the average tenure continues to decrease, and most Aussies have been at their current job for less than five years.³

If ever there was a business case for improving employee engagement and retention, it's the increasing cost of

replacing disengaged workers. The monetary cost of hiring a new employee recently doubled to an average of \$23,860.⁴ Not to mention that time to hire has risen consistently for the last four years – now at an all-time high of 44 days.⁵ The knock-on effects of lower productivity, under-resourced teams and disengagement can be financially devastating for businesses, especially in such a challenging economic climate.

To boost retention, many companies are amping up their total rewards strategy, including not only fair pay and benefits, but also holistic wellbeing support, building a culture of appreciation and facilitating meaningful work.

The other prevailing preoccupation is the post-pandemic question: to flex or not to flex. Employers are either struggling to get employees back to the office to rebuild a workplace culture, or working hard to keep remote, hybrid and deskless workers connected and engaged in the virtual office. The need for culture and connection – irrespective of where employees are working – remains a question that most will admit they are still working out the answer to.

Now, let's check in with employees.

Employees: It's blue, the feeling we've got

In the last two years, the Australian workforce has seen a huge hit to financial and mental wellbeing. As a result, employers are feeling increasing pressure to engage their people and provide them with the resources and support they need.

While 53% of Australian employees say that stress from cost of living increases is negatively impacting their work, those

aged 25-34 (64%) and employees in Sales, Media & Marketing (79%) and Arts & Culture (70%) are feeling it more.

But the dissatisfaction runs much deeper than financial stress.

While there are so many things that great employers should seek to cultivate, including workplace pride, belonging and a good work-life integration, this year's employee survey highlighted that there is a lot of work to be done across all of these crucial areas of employee wellbeing and connection:



42%

of employees frequently feel stressed

40%

of employees frequently feel overwhelmed

36%

of employees frequently feel disconnected from their manager

39%

of employees frequently experience burnout

26%

of employees frequently experience loneliness

29%

of employees frequently feel disconnected from their colleagues

With these statistics in mind, it's no surprise that in 2023, one in three employees surveyed are looking or intend to look for work within the next year. While this is a significant drop from 2021, when one in two employees were looking to quit, it's still a significant concern. Additionally, one in four employees are waiting for the economy to improve before they start looking for new opportunities. These results tell us that while people are unhappy, cost of living pressures are forcing people to stay.

So, what does this mean for employers?

On one hand, you have the issues created by the leavers: the cost and time required to backfill the roles, overworked teams and increased workplace stress. On the other hand, you have the issues created by the stayers who would rather leave but can't afford to, resulting in more disgruntled detractors in the workplace, making it even more important to ensure people stay engaged - from their first day until their last.



Companies who still think a strong company culture is a nice-to-have or who are unwilling to give employees autonomy or recognition are either seeing disengagement increase while productivity decreases (hello quiet quitters!) or watching as their star talent votes with their feet.

Joy Adan, Senior Manager Thought Leadership, Reward Gateway

What's driving people out the door...

Below are the top ten reasons why people choose to leave their employer, highlighting elements of the employee experience that combine or accumulate before they decide to hand in their notice. If your attrition rate is higher than you'd like and disengagement is a challenge you're keen to tackle, **these are the areas of opportunity most likely to improve retention and engagement:**



*The top reason employees give for doing unpaid overtime is wanting to do their best work, especially for the 18-24 age group. That tells us that many of these overworked people are the hardworking, energetic achievers you want to keep, but their workload is putting them at risk of leaving.



...Towards an exciting new opportunity

Australians are finding it harder to venture away from a stable job, but it gets a whole lot easier when a shiny new role is set in front of them. If you are an employer who needs top talent to fill your vacant roles, these are the top ten 'must-haves' that employees want to see. **These are the things to package and promote to potential candidates as part of your Employee Value Proposition:**



*Only 26% of HR managers feel their employers provide this.

Seven strategies to improve talent attraction, engagement and productivity

It's not (always) about the money, money, money

Understandably, fair pay takes the top position when most people look for a job, but keep in mind the next four things on a candidate's 'must-have' list have little to do with compensation, and everything to do with culture.

People want:

- A manager who cares
- A balance between autonomy and community, or the ability to stay connected while they work flexibly
- Leaders they can trust
- To be rewarded and recognised for their contribution

Remuneration constraints: There's another way

In our survey, a large number of employees agree the following are **more important than a 10% pay rise**:



Providing an unforgettable employee experience is worth its weight in gold. When those younger workers leave after a few quick years (as statistics say they may), you'll want them to leave as ambassadors, not detractors. Their ability to talk up their incredible tenure at your organisation with their future co-workers can do wonders for your talent pipeline.

So while raising salaries may not always be possible or within your control, there are many other meaningful ways to attract, retain and engage employees.

The winning combination: Compensation, care and connection

In a 2022 PwC survey of 1,800 Australian workers, employees placed the most value on remuneration and other financial incentives, proving once again that it's worth revisiting - and possibly repackaging - your total rewards offering to ensure it stays competitive. Rounding out their top five must-haves were mental health support, gym memberships, work/life balance and a supportive culture. This aligns with Reward Gateway's findings that while compensation is an important factor, your company's ability to provide employees care and connection will not only attract new talent, but inspire them to stay and give their best.

Strategy One: Equip managers with the tools and training to support employees' wellbeing

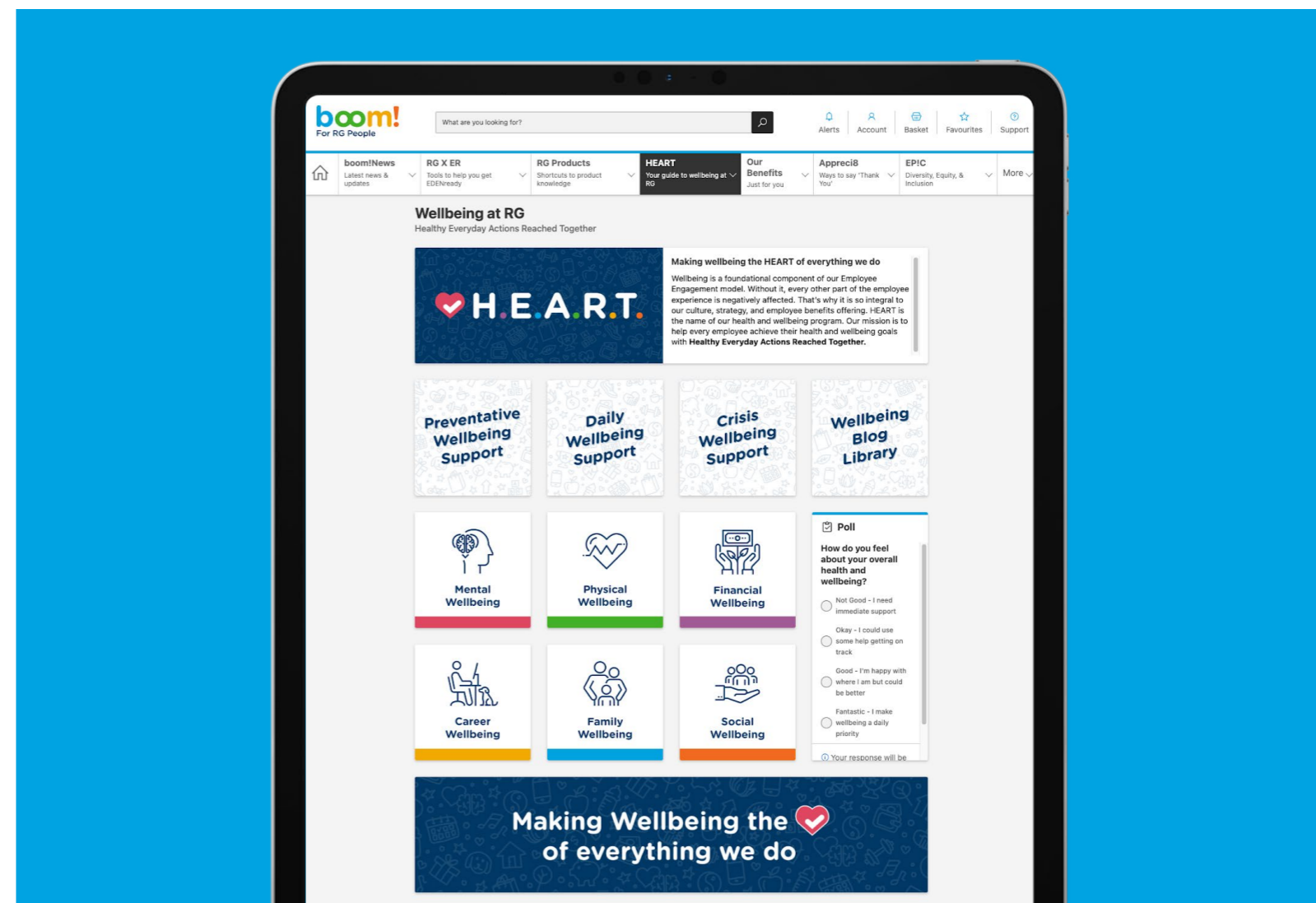
Over our many surveys, having a manager who cares about their team's wellbeing consistently tops the list of employee needs, but only one in three Aussie employees (34%) agree that their manager cares. This year's survey results reveal that 59% of HR managers agree that leaders in Australia are not taking wellbeing seriously, with a sizable 27% saying they strongly agree. Only a third of HR managers surveyed say employees are encouraged to focus on their wellbeing, while only 23% of employees feel encouraged by leadership to focus on their wellbeing.

So, what tools and training can organisations provide to set up managers for success when it comes to wellbeing?

One simple but powerful gesture is to give managers permission to put wellbeing on the agenda. This could start with leaders sharing what they're doing to demonstrate self-care, especially since only 24% of employees believe their

manager models wellbeing. Leaders could also ensure there's time in team meetings and one-to-ones to check in with colleagues and consider what's happening outside work that may be impacting their ability to concentrate. Are they worried about putting food on the table, the rising cost of rent or repaying a significant debt? While employers can't control many external stressors, we can control how we help our employees respond. Enabling these conversations helps employees identify areas where they need additional support or services.

To ensure those people are accessing the help they need, restructure or repackage your total rewards or benefits offering so it reflects the ways your organisation supports your employees, whether it's their financial, physical, mental, career, social or family wellbeing. Tech platforms and channels can also help time-poor managers find and direct employees to the wellbeing support provided by the company, making it easier for people leaders to encourage employees to make the most of these services.



Reward Gateway's people team reorganised our employee benefits and changed how they are presented on our employee engagement platform, dividing the services and resources based on the urgency of the support that employees need and to reflect how they support six different areas of personal wellbeing.

We understand that wellbeing needs and priorities are unique to each individual, which is why we provide a diverse, inclusive and holistic offering. This not only helps employees have confidence in what we offer, but helps managers find the resources they need to support their people quickly and respectfully.

Benefits: The hidden must-have

Aussie job hunters are savvy when scouting for their next opportunity. They might not have heard the term ‘total rewards package,’ but that’s exactly what they’re looking for.* Salary is one piece, but they’re also looking for benefits, flexibility, wellbeing support, recognition and ongoing development.

Does your organisation’s total rewards contain these elements? And do you make this offering crystal clear in your recruitment, onboarding and employee journey?

Spending on benefits and new investments

- HR managers say they spend **29%** of their total rewards budget on benefits
- **73%** of HR managers from companies with 301-499 employees say they are planning to increase investment in employee benefits over the next year, while **53%** of those from companies with 2,500+ employees say the same.

HR perceptions on benefits versus employee reality

HR managers tend to have a rosy view of how much employees know about and enjoy their benefits programs – you only need to look at the percentage of leaders who agree with the statements below, compared to employees. Boosting communication about existing but potentially underused programs can help employees thrive and get more out of their work life.

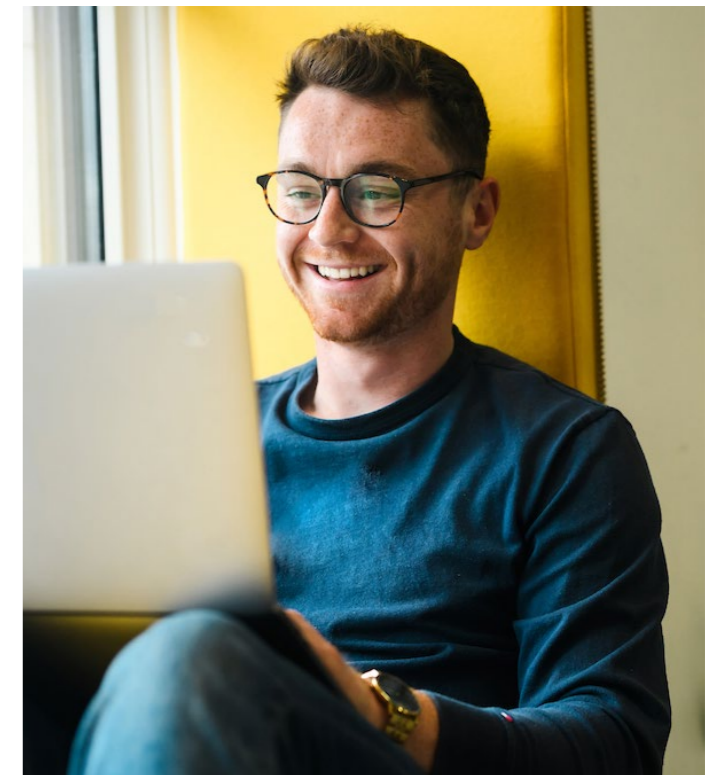
	Employees have a good knowledge of the benefits offered at work	Employees make use of all the benefits that are relevant to them	HR managers encourage employees to make use of the benefits that are relevant to them
HR managers	83%	81%	81%
Employees	66%	56%	67%

*A Robert Half survey of 300 Australian hiring managers found that almost two-thirds have had a candidate accept a job offer because of the company’s employee benefits rather than the salary offered.



The pressure is on for leaders to ensure employees are well-equipped to deliver their best and reach maximum productivity in minimum time. The right tools can simplify and fast-track things like onboarding, upskilling, ensuring new hires are aligned with company mission, goals and values and keeping them engaged by recognising their contribution. That is the key to unlocking discretionary effort, even when there are plenty of outside stressors.

Kylie Terrell, APAC Director of Consultancy, Reward Gateway



Leverage tech to recognise and reward employees and leaders who ‘walk the talk’ when it comes to wellbeing, providing positive feedback and a much-needed boost in dopamine that can help them get through a tough day or month at work. In the age of remote and dispersed work, a digital recognition platform helps managers shine a spotlight on the individuals and teams who are excelling and whose ways of working might otherwise remain unseen. It also helps managers align employee behaviour with company values and showcase what ‘great’ looks like in action for your organisation.

Tips to Turn the Tide

For Attracting Talent

Ensure potential candidates are well aware of your organisation's wellbeing benefits and initiatives. Promote these in your job ads, website and social media channels so it's clear your organisation promotes a culture of wellbeing.

For Engaging Employees

Package and promote your wellbeing offerings so all employees can easily find information about what is available and access what they need. Highlight those who lead by example, including managers who prioritise wellbeing, people making big savings using your discounts program or success stories from those willing to share their experience using the EAP.

Making Wellbeing the ❤️ of everything we do

Reward Gateway employees share eCards that celebrate wellbeing as a core value.

Making wellbeing the ❤️ of everything we do

Lou continuously promotes mental wellbeing across our team in Team Meetings and in my 121. He is advocate for our wellbeing coaching benefit and is very open and honest about his own use of this support, which in turn encourages others to reach out and get the support they need.

H.E.A.R.T.

Supporting employees' financial wellbeing during a cost of living crisis

While more than half of Australian employees say that stress from cost of living increases is negatively impacting their work, only a third of HR managers surveyed felt they were well-equipped to support the financial wellbeing of employees.

HR perceptions on financial wellbeing offerings versus employee reality

Again, HR managers are more positive than employees about their company's financial wellbeing support and employees' awareness of it. This is another opportunity to boost communication about existing but potentially underused programs.

- **92% of HR managers** believe their employer's financial wellbeing offering is helpful, but **47% of employees** think the offering is dissatisfactory or below average.
- **80% of HR managers** believe employees have a good understanding of how to maximise financial wellbeing benefits at work, but only **57% of employees** agree.

The HR team at Equifax launched a company-wide survey for a temperature check on existing benefits offers, probing deeper with questions like, 'which benefits do you value?', 'which don't you value?', 'what are we missing?' and 'what would you like to see?' Consistently, employees wanted discount options to address the rising cost of living.

EQUIFAX

The organisation's answer to employees' struggle to find up-to-date information on their benefits package and other HR resources was to launch a centralised platform hub, which they named 'BenEFX,' which now hosts all of those resources in one easily centralised place. To help address the financial strain of the current economy, Equifax also launched Reward Gateway's discounts program to take advantage of savings and cashback offers at hundreds of retailers. Employees now enjoy discounts on everything from everyday essentials to travel and luxury purchases and have saved over \$50.5K in just the first year of use.

Strategy Two: Offer flexibility in work location and allow people control of their own schedule

One thing both employees and HR managers agree on was how much their workplace culture allows them to have **work-life integration**: only one third of both respondent cohorts agree that this was the case in their current organisations. And 35% of employees say they would quit due to a lack of flexible working, which ranks as the fifth reason for leaving.

Many organisations are reluctant to let people work on their own time and in their own place because it doesn't fit with the nature of their work or the organisation's business goals. While you may not be able to give employees complete control over their schedules, talk with team members about what is possible. Some organisations give employees more freedom around which public holidays or days of celebration they take off, aligning with their personal or religious beliefs. One small change could involve allowing employees to determine their own start times with the caveat that they're available for clients when required.



If you provide access to flexible working, can you work with your team to ensure they are making the most of the opportunities to meet face-to-face?

Many organisations are being more intentional about the time employees spend in the office. Rather than treating it as just another workspace, they're using the time together to create opportunities for face-to-face collaboration, connection, shared learning and the celebration of accomplishments that may not be visible to others.

To support a constantly evolving return-to-work strategy, some organisations have provided employees with guidance on how and when to work in different locations, depending on what they want to achieve and how they are feeling:

		I feel	I can	This supports our value to	These workspace elements support my success	RG recommends working from
Recommended Home Modes	Retreat	Recharged	De-stress, reflect, refocus, decompress, relax, balance, meditate, reset, wellbeing session, read	We are human	Quiet and private space, ability to step away being empowered to take time	Home
	Plugged In	Accomplished	Produce, flow, focus, concentrate, accomplish, work on complicated task, LTTV virtual Sessions, virtual volunteering	We work hard	Headphones, music, no distractions, desk, wifi, charger, monitor, clean desk	Home
	1-to-1	Supported	Hold client demos, meet and strengthen relationships, mentoring, make decisions, address concerns, provide feedback	We speak up	WFH Desk Bundle, well lit, privacy encouraged, headphones, video conferencing	Home
Recommended Office Modes	Meeting Little	Connected with my team	Brainstorm, connect with teams and clients, hold demos, plan, learn, focus, huddle, bond, share, set goals	We push the boundaries	Bookable spaces that allow social distancing or video conferencing, privacy encouraged	Office
	Meeting Large	Connecting with Clients	Align with my team, collaborate, inspire, share, problem solve, learn, communicate, celebrate, boom!Fest	We think global	Bookable large spaces that allow social distancing, seamless connectivity, high energy, bright and airy, transparency	Office
	Buzzin'	Collaborative and Productive	Do lively work, mindmap, create ideas, show I am available, talk on the phone and video calls, shadow and mentor, have impromptu meetings, work side-by-side	We own it	Comfortable noise, movable chairs, teamwork, collaboration with team mates	Office
	Briefing	Aligned	Learn, onboard, train, network, align, celebrate, interact, inspire, EPIC events	We delight our customer	Seamless connectivity to global teams, large spaces, digital displays, whiteboard, sticky notes, notepads & pens	Office
	#rgfun	Happy	Socialise, play, drink, gather, celebrate, learn, team wellbeing, EPIC events, de-stress	We love our job	Games, food, activities, events, dogs, downtime, well, Experience Manager support, non-disruptive space	Office

Reward Gateway has Home and Office modes to help employees choose where they will do their best work.



Hand-in-hand with a strong face-to-face strategy is an intentional digital connection strategy. Innovative organisations are building a digital campfire of sorts: a space where employees can connect, support each other, celebrate, share their stories of contribution and how they fit into the bigger story of their company's success. These connection platforms are the most effective and efficient ways to reach people wherever they are, creating a ripple effect of good work and establishing a regular rhythm of communication.

Tips to Turn the Tide

For Attracting Talent

Be clear with candidates what flexibility they will (or will not) have in their roles and the aspects of their job or schedule that they will have control over. Provide real examples of how your teams create connections while together and how people across your organisation achieve work-life integration, regardless of their seniority or location.

For Engaging Employees

Convene manager/employee sessions to discuss flexibility so everyone is clear on expectations. Conduct regular check-ins so your part-time, hybrid or dispersed employees have guidance and support about how best to stay informed and productive if they're working in a different location.

Strategy Three: Make it easy for managers to build strong connections with their direct reports and across the organisation

In a previous Australian survey, we learned that **91% of employees feel that being listened to by leaders has a positive impact on their work wellbeing**, and that **78%** of people feel more motivated when their manager recognises them for their good work.⁶ But in our recent survey, **33%** of employees state that they frequently feel disconnected from their manager.

Building connections may seem easy to do, but it does require attention. What is the basis of a strong work relationship? In our view, it can be as simple as letting employees know they are valued and that their needs are supported. And how do managers form great relationships with their employees? It involves skills, time, tools and a culture of willingness.

First off, relationship-building must be modelled in an organisation from the senior leadership team to managers and employees. When senior leaders take the time and effort to build connections – not just with their direct reports but with individuals across the organisation – this sets the tone for what is valued and expected, creating a culture of connection that trickles out to all levels. Providing senior leadership with the channels and

platforms to communicate openly and regularly with people across all levels of the business can help bridge this divide.

Secondly, managers need the skills to create connections – skills like active listening, involving employees in the strategic direction of the team and recognising great work. Ensuring managers have these skills will involve training, evaluations and employee satisfaction surveys.

Thirdly, we need to consider time and tools. Do managers feel they have the bandwidth and the latitude to set aside tactical work and meet with employees to maintain relationships? It's about time, but it's also about prioritisation. Do one-on-ones get cancelled regularly, or are those time slots held sacrosanct? To support the time-poor people leaders who don't get a chance to meet or see their direct reports face-to-face on a regular basis, are there platforms or channels you can take advantage of to make sure the hard work that team members are contributing gets the visibility and recognition it deserves?

Having the right tools, processes and systems in place to connect managers and employees helps support relationship building. Only a third of HR managers say that managers in their organisation have access to tools to connect with employees remotely, and only a third say managers understand how to use these tools.



Story House Early Learning operates approximately 40 early learning centres throughout the east coast of Australia, employing over 1,200 staff in total – 97% of whom are offline workers, and mostly women under 40.

While Story House prides itself on providing children with a sense of belonging through its services, team members didn't have a place to share that same community feeling. Facing a lack of connection to its full employee value proposition, the company partnered with Reward Gateway to create a platform called 'Main Street', a comprehensive, mobile-accessible hub that puts everything in one place, while also seamlessly linking to the other systems and information staff rely on as part of their everyday jobs.

The HR team shares all the educational and pedagogical successes happening every day throughout the organisation, and employees can use the platform to celebrate each other's successes and highlight the extraordinary efforts made by staff every day. This visibility allows educators to learn from one another and share experiences and practical tips. Even though the vast majority of employees don't use a laptop at work, they're now choosing to log into the mobile app on their lunch break or in their own personal time.

“ We feel more connected to our teams out in the field than we ever have before. We get an instant, transparent sense of what's going on every time we log in. It's become the barometer for culture that we always wanted.

Head of People & Culture, Story House Early Learning

Tips to Turn the Tide

For Attracting Talent

Make the most of the interview process and ensure managers and candidates get an opportunity to connect and share both personal and professional values and goals. If open and honest communication is the bedrock of your company culture, provide examples of what this looks like within someone's role.

For Engaging Employees

Consider the tools and time your managers have to build strong relationships with their employees. Do they need tips on how to conduct a fruitful one-to-one catch-up with their direct reports? Are there channels where employees can easily access information from leaders about what they need to be successful in their roles?

Strategy Four: Cultivate a feeling of belonging at work among employees

Only one in three (34%) of Australian employees feel a sense of belonging at work, but those that do are 1.5x more likely to recommend their employers to their friends and families.

Employees who work in inclusive organisations are also four times more likely to report that work positively impacts their mental health, which has a knock-on effect on their overall wellbeing and productivity at work.⁷

How does your organisation promote inclusivity and cultivate belonging? This is particularly crucial to consider as more people work remotely and there are fewer opportunities to meet face-to-face.

One of the foundational elements of any engagement strategy is workspace. If you've got people working remotely or in dispersed sites, it's critical to ensure people – regardless of how, when and where they work – are safe and supported, and have spaces suitable for collaboration, focus and building social connections.

For dispersed teams, use virtual or digital engagement platforms to lean into a more transparent style of communication. Create an internal newsfeed so employees have visibility over key business decisions and goals, changes within the organisation, individual and team wins and personal life achievements. Increasing the frequency of communication is particularly important during times of change, ensuring all employees are well-informed, reassured and capable of making clear decisions.

47%

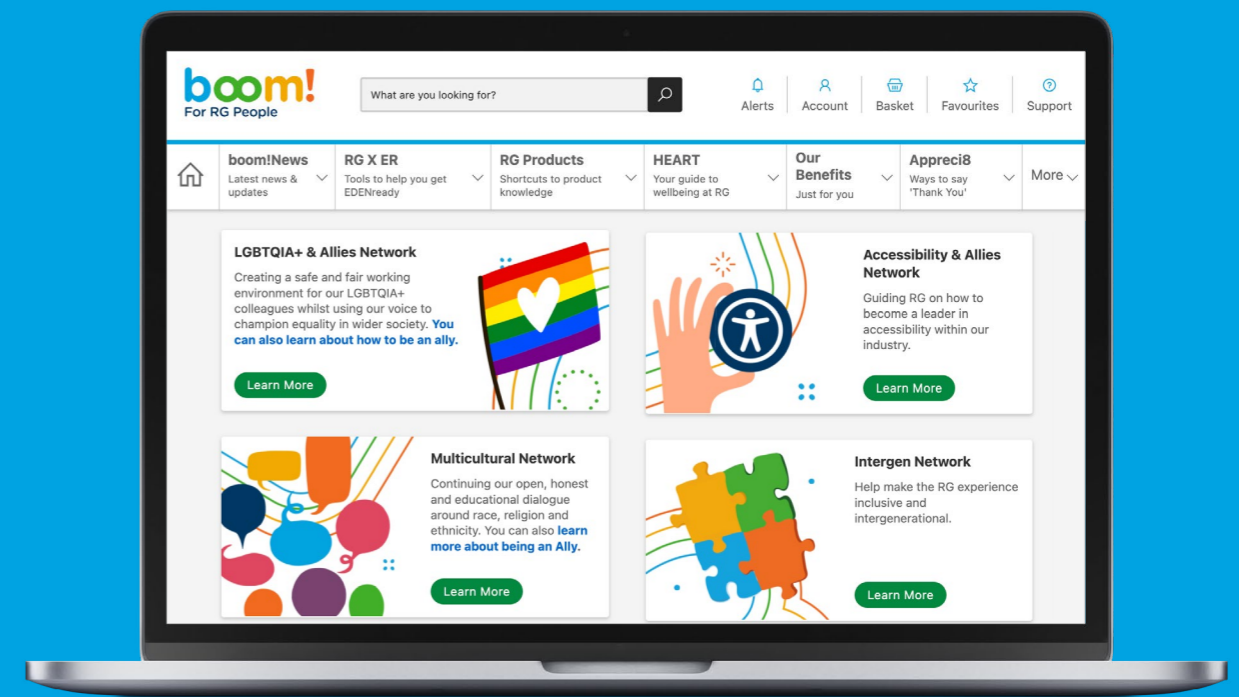


of the youngest respondents (those aged 18 to 24) feel they can bring their authentic self to work, and

40%



have a sense of connection and belonging at work, much higher than other age groups.



Using communication tools or channels that enable multiple contributors not only lightens the load for busy HR teams, it also ensures more people across the organisation have a voice. Leaders and extroverted teams may be used to being in the spotlight, but democratising your employee communications may be the thing your organisation needs to shine the spotlight on those who are often invisible.

Leveraging multimedia like video, GIFs, photos and emojis in a more customisable communications platform can help make your updates more human and relatable, ensuring the message lands in the way it was intended. Create networks, mentoring programs and opportunities for people to share their interests and passions outside work.

Quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and focus groups can offer more objective insights if you're having trouble seeing how your EVP and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives are being received. Ask employees to provide their honest feedback and any ideas on how things can be improved. By inviting them into the process, you can foster a sense of belonging and pride in your employees, helping them shape your organisation's culture.

At Reward Gateway, we use our engagement platform to connect people with common interests outside work, including book clubs, running groups, parenting support, and educational and advocacy groups known as EPIC Networks.



Diversity and belonging promote innovation, growth and improved business results. But most importantly, they create equity. At Reward Gateway, we believe that diversity, equity and inclusion are fundamental strategic values. We encourage our own employees to use our resource groups called EPIC Networks (for Encouraging Positive Improvements Continuously) because we want our people to play an active role in how we build and grow an inclusive culture.

Nebel Crowhurst

Tips to Turn the Tide For Attracting Talent

Promote the programs that celebrate different people across your organisation on multiple platforms (reach your candidates wherever they are, whether it's LinkedIn or TikTok). Make sure your interview team is diverse and likely to connect with a wide range of candidates, and are open to sharing their personal and professional experiences.

For Engaging Employees

Make time for in-person (when possible) and remote team connection where personal and business topics can be covered. It can be as simple as asking, 'any fun plans for the weekend?' Create opportunities and channels that encourage contributions and stories from a diverse range of groups and teams across your organisation.

Strategy Five: Support employee learning and growth

The top three times when employees are feeling most engaged



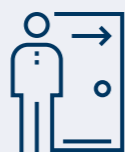
The value of learning and development investments



76% of employees say they are more inclined to stay at a company if it offers continuous learning and development.⁸



90% of HR managers feel training benefits employee productivity and development.⁹



86% of HR managers say training improves retention.¹⁰



85% of HR managers believe training positively impacts organisational growth.¹¹



Learning and development check all the benefit boxes: retention, productivity, effectiveness and growth. And they can happen in many different contexts, the most obvious being in-company training, conference participation and support for continuous learning through colleges or universities. As employees proceed through learning and gain certifications, it's key to recognise these accomplishments across your organisation.

Time with managers is also a great way for employees to learn. But to make employees more aware of this more casual form of learning, managers may need to call out learning and growth from regular one-on-ones or summarise this development in performance conversations.

Mentoring programs can also drive development. Mentees gain new skills, insights into work culture and guidance from an experienced professional. But mentors also benefit from these programs, gaining leadership experience, recognition of their expertise and new learnings from their mentees. Whether you focus on connection between departments and roles or multigenerational support (younger employees gaining insight in their first workplace or older employees re-entering the workforce), mentor-mentee relationships are a great way to help employees take their work to the next level.

Generational diversity provides an untapped learning opportunity

Your workforce may span Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, and Gen Zers, plus Gen Alpha in the not too distant future. Much has been made of the generational divides. But since people are most engaged when they are learning and growing, have you considered the many ways that different generations can learn from each other?

Consider tapping into your multi-generational workforce for shared learning opportunities, such as:

- Establish a traditional mentoring program where senior employees share their skills and insights with newer recruits
- Establish a reverse-mentoring program where the new generation of workers share their skills and insights with the older generation
- Offer skills-swap sessions or lunch-and-learn opportunities
- Create a 'career pathway' group or channel where people share their career journeys and lessons learned

These simple, cost-effective tactics are often free or low-cost, but allow people to establish a sense of connection and learn essential insights.



Tips to Turn the Tide For Attracting Talent

Proactively share with candidates the growth plan for people in that role. Where can they go next? Who has already paved that career path in your company?

For Engaging Employees

Consider if your learning and development resources appeal to all generations. Are there in-person options for people that prefer learning face-to-face? Are there on-demand resources like short videos and handy explainer guides?

Strategy Six: Put company values front and centre in company decision-making and goal-setting

Organisational values should not be a dusty list of vaguely inspirational words that no employee can recall. Values need to be 'off the walls and in the halls': relevant and lived out daily in culture, strategy and tactics.

The first question to ask is whether your values truly match what is important to your people. Depending on the age of your workforce and the nature of your industry, employees may expect an aggressive carbon footprint reduction strategy or a fulsome diversity plan. One thing's for certain: Your values must respect and reflect the contribution of your people or no amount of ESG action will keep people engaged in the long run.

Once your values have been confirmed or updated for the times, those values need to be shared with all employees and translated into action through strategies and tactics in every context, including recognition.

When your people can tell you what your values are and quote them when setting goals, making decisions, measuring success or praising others, you know your values are being lived every day throughout your organisation. At Reward Gateway, our recognition awards are tied to our values, ensuring that our employees keep these values at the heart of everything we do.

Integrating your values into your everyday activities and communications means that not only will your employees know them back to front, they'll also keep them in mind when interacting with peers, making key decisions and driving your organisation forward.

To ensure your values are embedded and integrated into your organisational framework, here are some fundamental principles to live by:

- Consistently remind your people of your 'North Star', communicating your company's purpose, why it's important and how they can connect to it.
- Implement a centralised platform where existing and new employees can access your purpose, mission and values at all times.
- Ensure that your purpose and values are baked into key processes, like your onboarding journey, reward and recognition framework and sales strategies.
- Develop a cultural handbook where you explain your values in greater detail and delve into how each department lives these values.

Providing this clear sense of purpose and embedding values into your everyday will empower your people, boost engagement and enthusiasm and strengthen your company culture.

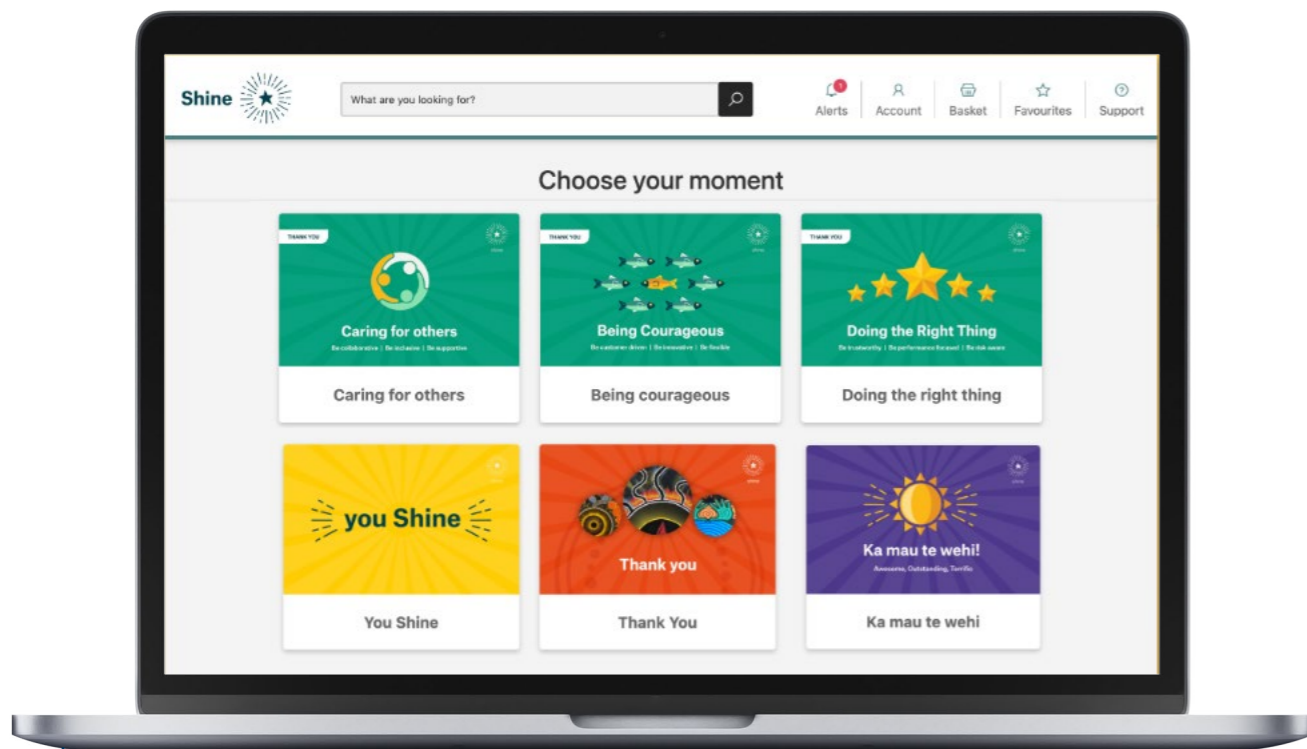
Tips to Turn the Tide

For Attracting Talent

When discussing values throughout the recruitment process, make sure you give candidates sufficient context. Don't fire off questions like, "what's your favourite value?" without first taking time to explain your values. Alternatively, you could frame your questions around the value without directly saying it: "Tell me a time when you had an off-the-wall idea, and how you convinced your boss to try it out" is a better way of asking, "how do you push the boundaries?"

For Engaging Employees

Integrate your values into your reward and recognition framework, assigning a value to a specific award or kudos. This will empower employees to consider your values everyday, link them to their actions and recognise these values in others.



Suncorp uses its company values in its reward and recognition program, Shine. Employees can send each other eCards whenever their colleagues have demonstrated that value in their day-to-day work.



Strategy Seven: Create a culture of recognition and reward



1 in 4 employees who say they are looking for or are planning to look for a new job this year say it's because they don't feel recognised by their current employer.

According to our research, employees who rate recognition from managers as excellent or good are more than three times as likely to be proud to work for their employer. **77%** say that having the ability to reward their peers for their good work helps with productivity and retention. And when recognised for their work, **78%** of employees say they are both more motivated and more likely to stay at an organisation.

The importance of recognition is one of the few things HR leaders and employees are aligned on:

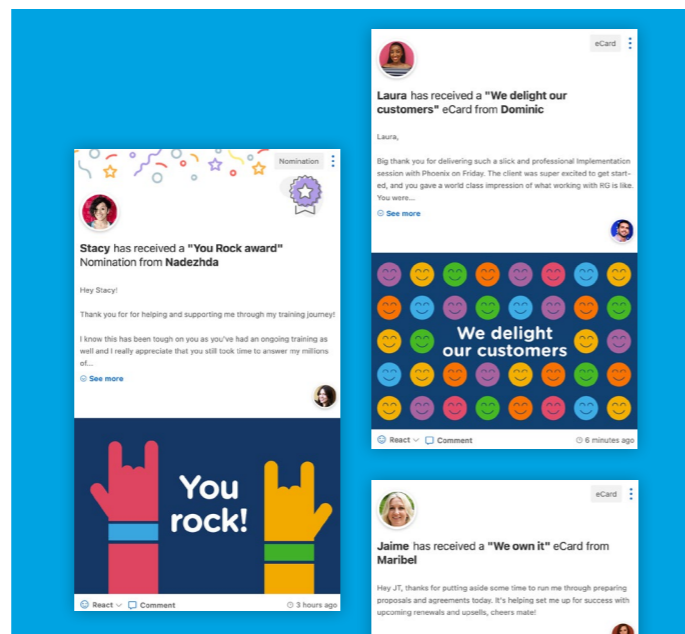
- **71%** of HR managers surveyed agree employee recognition is critical;
- **76%** feel that employees who receive recognition are more likely to be satisfied at work;
- And **74%** feel rewarding and recognising achievements influences an employee's choice to recommend the company to others.

But despite its importance, **66%** of HR managers believe their employees don't have access to the right tools to effectively deliver frequent and meaningful recognition. Almost half of HR leaders say that lack of time affects their ability to regularly recognise employees, and two in five say it isn't easy to do.

How can organisations create the systems to enable frequent and effective recognition that helps people feel connected and valued and inspires them to stay?

While annual or long-service awards, gift cards and simple thank-yous may have been sufficient in the past, recognition strategies have had to evolve in this new world of work to keep employees happy and engaged. **Digital recognition and reward programs provide leaders with an R&R experience that is flexible, efficient and scalable, while providing employees recognition that is frequent, accessible and visible.**

Having a central, digital space where your people can see, share and celebrate each other's successes is key to creating a community and a culture of recognition within your organisation. Whether your workforce is dispersed because of remote work or different sites and locations, or whether you're hoping to find new ways to spotlight important work that different teams are doing, a digital recognition platform is a great way to bring your organisation together. It also gives both employees and leaders the power to recognise each other when they want it most:



Top three times when employees want recognition

- 83%**
 During performance and evaluation*
 (39% say extremely important)
- 81%**
 During learning and development
 (33% say extremely important)
- 78%**
 During times of organisational change
 (29% say extremely important)

*This is a good reminder that performance evaluations, which can make employees feel vulnerable, are actually an opportunity to support and engage through recognition.

Digital rewards are also an opportunity to offer employees more choice in how they redeem their rewards and provide additional financial wellbeing support: **68%** of employees say they want to be able to use rewards on essentials like groceries and petrol, rather than luxury goods.

This can make a real difference to those employees struggling with cost of living increases. Issuing bulk rewards digitally and scheduling or automating end-of-year-bonuses, anniversary or birthday rewards also allows you to reduce HR admin, and streamline your processes, while reaching thousands of employees in just a few clicks.

Creating a frequent, year-round recognition and reward program that reflects your unique company culture and employer brand can build loyalty to you - design eCards and rewards with unique names and fun, relatable images that make each moment of celebration memorable and meaningful!

Story House Early Learning uses digital eCards so their educators can easily give and receive recognition at any time, from any location, on any device. For more about their story, see p24.



Tips to Turn the Tide

For Attracting Talent

Got your eye on a great candidate? Send them a message congratulating them on an achievement or project they've talked about on LinkedIn. Don't just tell, but show a potential candidate that a culture of recognition is the lifeblood of your organisation and can be felt even before day one.

For Engaging Employees

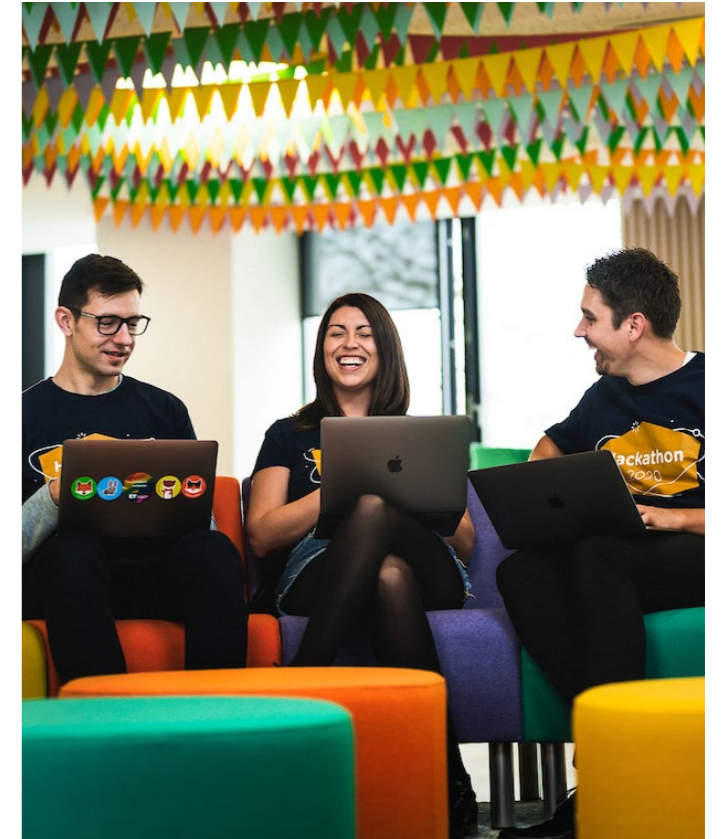
Giving managers and employees access to multiple ways to recognise is key, but to keep that momentum going, plan for a few regular events that remind people to recognise. That may be during performance review season, whenever employees are learning or growing or during annual celebrations like Employee Appreciation Day in March or World Gratitude Day in September!

An adaptable and engaged workforce

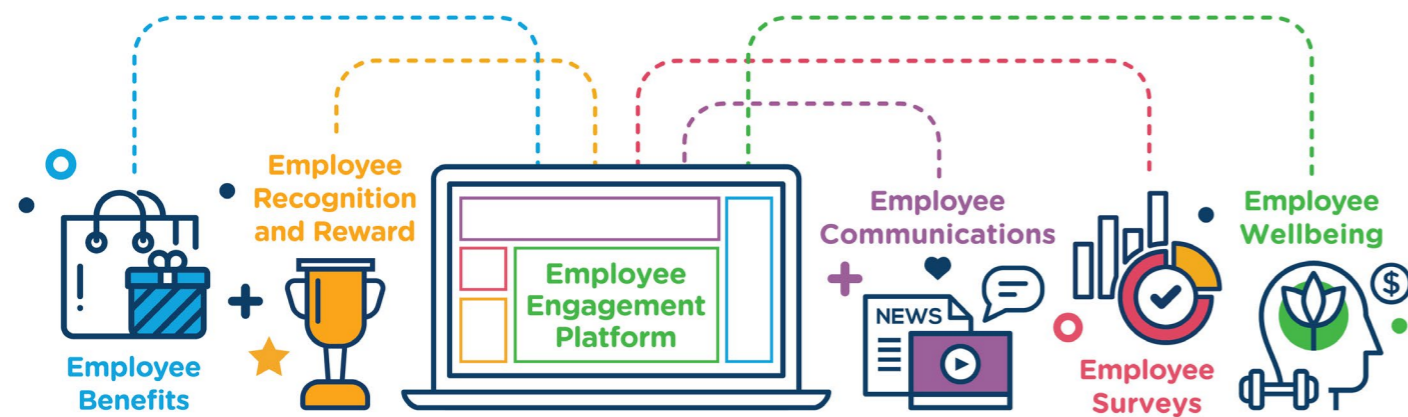
It's well known that the success of an organisation is fueled by its people.

Knowing not only why Australians are leaving their jobs but also what they are seeking in those greener pastures can give you a leg up on recruitment, engagement and retention strategies. Many of these are simple, common-sense, human-centred actions that cost you nothing more than time and attention. Others are technology-based solutions that let you efficiently and effectively connect and engage employees wherever they are, whatever their role.

Engaging a single employee to connect within the workplace can be a simple act. But when done across a whole organisation over years, it's an investment not only in reaching your goals but also in building your reputation as a great place to work. It's an effective, long-term way of ensuring you'll always have a deep talent pool to draw on when you're looking to fill existing and new positions. You'll also spend less time and money attracting, interviewing and onboarding new people because no one will want to leave your amazing company.



We hope these strategies for attaining an engaged and productive Australian workforce will grow your reputation as an employer of choice and fuel your business success in future years.



About Reward Gateway

Reward Gateway helps companies engage, motivate and retain people – every day, all over the world.

Our unified employee engagement hub provides the best of recognition, reward, wellbeing, surveys, benefits and discounts that support talent acquisition, retention and values-driven growth.

Get in touch with us to learn more about Reward Gateway solutions:

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