

It's Your Yale

“Lead with recognition” webinar transcript

January 27, 2026

Emily DeFrances ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to “Lead with recognition,” the first webinar in our “Celebrating moments that matter” recognition and engagement series for managers. We are so glad you could join us on this snowy winter day, although at least the sun is shining, so that's something. For those of you that I have not met, my name is Emily DeFrances. I am a senior manager of recognition and engagement here in Internal communications. We are part of OPAC, the Office of Public Affairs and Communications, and I am joined today by my teammates, Brenda Naegel and Ashley Blackwell. Before we begin, just a couple of housekeeping items. We will be holding time to answer questions at the end of the webinar, but at any time, please feel free to add a question to the chat panel. Also, just want to call out that this meeting is being recorded so that we can share or replay with those who are not able to attend today.

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All right. So I want to thank you for helping to kick things off for us today with our word cloud activities. So let's take a look at some of the responses that we received. All right. So I think when we talk about what being recognized, how that makes you feel, I think not surprisingly, words like appreciated and valued really pop, confident, acknowledged, seen, happy. Interestingly, things like maybe even embarrassed, which is something we'll talk about in a moment. Recognition, people like to be recognized in different ways. So we'll touch on that as part of our conversation today. As you shared those words, I'm sure that there were certain moments that came to mind for you when you thought back to a time when you were recognized by a colleague or a manager because recognition when it's done well really stays with you. That's what makes it so powerful.

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And it doesn't have to be big. I'll share an example that's always stayed with me. When I was in a role previous to when I joined Yale, it was about 15 years ago. I had just joined a new project management organization and we were gearing up to roll out public exchanges for the first time. So it was a very high pressure, high profile space. And I was just getting to know the people on the team. I was wrapping my arms around the work, drinking from the proverbial fire hose. And I'd been there for about three weeks. And I came in one morning and there was this handwritten note propped up on my desk and it said, “Have I told you lately how glad I am that you're on the team?” And it was signed by the woman who ran the entire project management office, somebody who was very, very busy, but who also took the time to really get to know her team.

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And I think she knew that I was probably feeling a little bit overwhelmed and she took the time

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out of what I know was an incredibly hectic schedule to write that note. And as well as being an amazing leader, she ended up becoming a mentor and a friend, and it all started with that note, which I still have. And it was just such a simple but such an impactful thing to do. And if there's one thing that we can leave you with today, it's this: that recognition does not need to be elaborate. It just needs to be authentic and it needs to be personal. But you don't have to take our word for it. There are plenty of statistics that illustrate why recognition matters at any level in the organization.

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So Ashley, if we go to the next slide, perfect. So just a few statistics, food for thought. Employees who feel strongly connected to their culture and recognition is a strong part of that, are four times as likely to be engaged at work. They are 62% less likely to feel burned out at work, and they are 43% less likely to be looking for a new job. Highly engaged teams are much more productive. They are more likely to go above and beyond in their work, and they're also much less likely to be absent to stay away from that phenomenon of quiet quitting. So these are all really powerful statistics that just highlight the impact that recognition can have and why it's so important. When people feel seen, when they feel appreciated, they are going to bring their best selves to work, and that's what makes recognition so powerful.

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So we hope that you come away from today's session with more ideas about how to recognize and celebrate your teams for the amazing work that they do. So today, we are going to highlight five of the recognition resources that are available to you, but we're going to share information about where you can go to learn more and tap into even more resources, because the more you know, the more resources you have at your fingertips, the easier it is to build recognition into your day. And these are resources that you can use whether your team is on campus, whether they're hybrid or remote, and hopefully you'll see how easily you could fit these into your busy schedules. As we highlight resources, we're going to share links in the chat, and then there'll also be a handy recap that we'll include at the end of our session as well so that you have access to these.

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So our first resource is our recognition preferences card. And we like to say that it all starts here because this is something that is so foundational when it comes to recognition. There is no one size fits all when it comes to how people like to be recognized. If you think back to that word cloud, that word embarrassed. For some people, this can be a moment that is a little cringey for them. So it's really important to understand how each member of your team likes to be recognized. Some people like to be celebrated in front of a group. They love the limelight. And some people prefer to fly under the radar. They're introverted, they're shy. That is not how they like to be recognized. And so knowing how each person on your team prefers to be recognized is critical. And the recognition preferences card is a really easy way to do this.

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You can download the card, you send it out to your team to complete and send it back to you. And then it's a great item to use as your onboarding new staff as well. When you get the recognition preferences card back from your team, don't just file it. Use it to have a conversation with your team members. Bring it to your next one-on-one. Spend a little bit of time talking a little more in depth about their preferences, their likes. You're going to learn more about them and they'll know that you really care about what matters to them. This card is available on the Recognition Hub, which is in the manager toolkit out on It's Your Yale, or we also have it available through Team Experience Builder, and we're going to pop that link into the chat for you.

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Okay. Our YCards. This is one of our most popular recognition resources. Many of you are going to be familiar with these, but you may not know about some of the recent enhancements we made to them. So first of all, we redesigned these cards last summer, so they have a new look and feel, and we added a few new ones like Welcome for new staff, or Just Because for those "have I told you lately?" moments. Of course, we have seasonal cards in there as well, like Grateful, we'll pop a Staff Spirit Week card in for June. And the YCards also have a new home. So these moved to our new recognition portal last July. The portal replaced the old YCard platform. And so now you can access the portal through single sign-on. So easier access, you don't have to remember a separate ID and password.

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And it puts a lot of our Recognition Resources into one place. And the link to the portal is out on the Recognition Resources page on It's Your Yale, which we'll pop into the chat. YCards are very versatile, super easy to use. There is something here for every occasion, whether you are celebrating a big project milestone like launching a new website, or you want to say thank you to somebody for helping out with something like, "Hey, thanks for pulling those last minute data points together for me for my meeting." And they're great for life events, birthdays, new house, new baby, you name it. Also, a couple of good tips for busy managers. You can schedule these. This is a great feature so that if you know your team's birthdays, service milestones, for example, you can go into the YCard app, you can schedule those YCards for those dates so that is one less thing that you have to remember to do.

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And then also, when you're sending a YCard, you can copy in that person's manager and that ensures that their manager knows that their team member is being recognized and it also gives that manager the chance to amplify that recognition themselves. So chat stickers. Chat stickers are another fun and very uniquely Yale way to celebrate a moment in the moment. They're a great way to express your thanks in a way that's very memorable and fun. And these are incredibly versatile. You can add them to your Teams chat, your Zoom chat. You can put them in an email. And if you have teams who are not at their desks but are more mobile, who maybe

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are spending more time on their phone than on their laptop or their computer, chat stickers are great because you can download them via the app store if you have an iPhone or an iPad, and then you can use them in text with your staff. We recently added a new series of stickers to the existing set, so there's lots of really fun options out there. Be sure to check those out.

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You can find more information on the recognition resources page on It's Your Yale, including information about how to download them on those different platforms that I mentioned. So let's talk about the celebration calendar. This is another handy resource. It is a great one-stop shop because it brings together a lot of the weekday cultural and popular events, official Yale holidays and industry observances into one place. So it is a great tool that can help you plan ahead. And if you're looking for ideas about how to weave some fun into an upcoming meeting, it is also a great source for inspiration. So for example, February 9th, which is coming up is Pizza Day. So that is a perfect opportunity to tap into New Haven's Claim to Fame as a thank you to your staff, a way of recognizing them for their hard work. So you can bring in pizza as a thank you, or if your team is virtual or hybrid, you can always integrate a poll into a meeting, ask people, "Hey, what's your favorite place to get pizza?" Always a good one to spark a discussion and controversy.

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Are you a Sally's or are you a Pepe's person or what's the oddest pizza topping you ever had? Whatever it is, it's just a great way to bring people together and also an opportunity to thank them for their work. And that's one example. This calendar, there's lots of other ones, volunteer week, mascot day, chocolate chip cookie day. So there are a lot of opportunities to celebrate and recognize your staff with some themed activities. So if you haven't already, definitely encourage you to check out the celebration calendar and again, that link is in the chat. Okay. So the last of the five resources we're going to talk about today is the celebration module. A lot of you will know this as the recognition wall. The name has changed, as has some of the functionality when we moved to that new recognition portal last July, and I'll talk more about that functionality in a moment.

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But for those of you who are maybe a little less familiar with this, the celebration module was designed to help teams celebrate service milestone anniversaries, and it works kind of like a Kudoboard. So, people receive an invitation to post messages to an online board where they can congratulate a team member for their service milestone. So, what's different about the celebration module versus the recognition wall. With the recognition wall, the invitations to post to the board were sent to the honorees' manager, and then the manager would invite other people to contribute. With the celebration module, managers still get that invitation 30 days prior to the anniversary date, but now the invitations also automatically go out to the managers directs and the honorees directs. So that's one less thing for managers to have to remember to do. That invite will automatically grow to that broader group of people.

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And anybody who's invited to post also has the ability to invite other people to contribute as well. The recognition wall celebrates traditional service milestone anniversaries, five year, 10 year, et cetera. The celebration module celebrates those, but it also now includes an invitation to post messages for staff members who are celebrating their one-year milestone anniversary. So it's a nice way to just not have to wait until five years into your Yale journey, but on that first year, you'll get the chance to congratulate a team member for hitting that one-year milestone. Honorees will still get an email on their anniversary date, which will have a link to let them know that they have messages to go view, and then they go out to the portal and they can see their message board there. All of those changes that I just talked about went into effect last July with the move to the new portal.

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One thing that we did want to highlight about the celebration module, because it's a question we frequently get. The celebration module is triggered by service milestones. So at this time, it can't be instigated by a manager to set up boards for other events like a non-milestone anniversary or a retirement. It's something that we're looking into, but it's not an option at this time. So if you are looking to create a digital message board for those types of celebrations, Kudoboard is a good option. There's a small fee, but it's a very reasonable option to explore. So we've highlighted five recognition resources, and in staying with the five theme, I did want to end this part of our session by touching on what makes recognition effective. Recognition works best when it's built on solid principles, and those principles are laid out here. So you want recognition to be timely. You want to make sure that it is delivered as close to the moment as possible. So you don't want to wait three weeks to tell somebody they did a fantastic job on that presentation. Tell them right after the presentation.

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You want it to be frequent. It's something that you want to integrate into your day-to-day. So whether that's a team meeting, whether it's a one-on-one, making sure that you're always making moments to celebrate. On our team meetings within our organization, we set aside time at the end of every meeting for Kudo so that we can recognize one another. And I think it's one of the things that we look forward to the most. So just making sure that that's a part of your DNA is really critical. You want to make sure that recognition is specific. You want to highlight the details for the why you're recognizing somebody. Thank you is nice, but thank you for taking the time to sit down with Sarah and show her how to navigate that website is more meaningful than just a general thank you. Let them know why you're thanking them.

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You want to make sure it's personalized. So this goes back to the recognition preferences card. Understanding how your people like to be recognized is so critical because then you can make sure that you're tailoring that recognition moment for them so that you show that you are

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understanding and respecting their recognition preferences. And finally, for it to be effective, recognition should be embedded into your culture's goals and mission. So tying back a recognition moment to your organization's goals, "Hey, that site you just launched, that project you just wrapped up, that's really going to help us achieve our goal of X." So people see how their work ties in and is integral to what your organization does. So embedding it into your teams, your cultures, your values is really critical.

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So you're going to find these five pillars out on our recognition hub, which is part of the manager toolkit in It's Your Yale. That hub has a lot of great information about building a recognition strategy, different recognition moments and resources, how to make the most of those. There's plenty of resources to tap into, whether you are a new manager and you're just building a recognition strategy or you're looking for how to evolve your current approach. But again, just that takeaway message for you guys, recognition doesn't have to be elaborate. It just needs to be meaningful to the person that you're celebrating.