

2026

THE EMPLOYEE STATE OF MIND

Stability, belonging, and why it's time to reimagine recognition.



Employees are entering 2026 with a renewed sense of optimism. After several years of change, shifting expectations, and ongoing transformation in how we work, people are ready for more stability and connection. Teams may operate more efficiently and expectations may continue to evolve, but employees are increasingly focused on finding workplaces where they feel grounded, supported, and part of something meaningful. As LinkedIn News recently noted, economists say the “low-hire, low-fire”¹ era might be ending, as companies begin to take a more active approach to reshaping their workforces. This shift can make employees feel less certain about what lies ahead, which increases the importance of a strong, people-centered culture.

We also see encouraging trends in how employees are approaching their careers. As Forbes reports, “selectivity is now giving way to caution in the job market.”² Glassdoor data shows that job applicants were 12% less likely to reject offers in 2025 than in 2023, signaling a shift toward more thoughtful, stability-focused decision making. People are looking for workplaces where they can grow, contribute, and feel a genuine sense of belonging. This desire is not driven by fear, but by a renewed appreciation for cultures that value purpose and connection.



Organizations have a unique opportunity to reimagine how employee recognition is used as a driver for stability, belonging, and engagement.



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Reimagining recognition means *elevating it from a set of individual actions to a consistent cultural practice*. Instead of being a series of isolated gestures, recognition becomes a way of supporting the whole employee. It not only honors service milestones but also acknowledges personal, professional, and organizational moments that shape the employee experience. With this 360° approach, recognition becomes a strategic lever that strengthens trust, reinforces connection, and helps people feel confident and supported.



Reimagining recognition means elevating it from a set of individual actions to a consistent cultural practice. At its heart, reimagining recognition means shifting from a program to a practice.

When recognition is consistent and authentic, employees feel seen, appreciated, and aligned. They experience their workplace as a community, not just a place to work. When recognition is intentional and integrated, positivity becomes part of the culture. Belonging grows, resilience strengthens, and performance follows.

*** Recognition becomes the thread that ties together culture, engagement, and purpose.**

This is the mindset employees are carrying into 2026. They want stability, yes, but also meaning. They want to feel connected to their work and to one another. And this creates the perfect moment for organizations to rethink recognition as a cultural foundation that supports people at every stage of their journey.

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/increasing-layoffs-suggest-low-hire-low-fire-is-over-6739540/>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2025/11/12/glassdoor-reveals-the-biggest-workplace-trends-for-2026/>