

Employee recognition email template

Thank an employee for specific work, privately or in front of the team.

Updated October 15, 2026. Written and reviewed by the HRTally Research Team.

When to use this template

Recognition only works when it's specific. A message that says great job, team is forgotten by lunch. One that says what the person did, why it mattered, and who it helped is remembered for years, and people often save these emails. Recognition is also among the most common things employees say they want more of, and among the cheapest to give.

Use the private version when the person would prefer it or when the work was behind the scenes. Use the team version when the work deserves visibility and you want others to see what good looks like. A recognition and rewards platform can make this a habit across the company, but a well-written email from a manager is still hard to beat.

Version 1: Private thank-you

SUBJECT Thank you for [specific work]

Hi [Employee first name],

I wanted to take a minute to thank you for [specific action, such as staying late to rebuild the schedule when three people called out on Saturday].

Because of that, [specific result, such as we kept both lines running and shipped every order on time]. [Customer or colleague name] noticed too and mentioned it to me.

It's exactly the kind of judgment and care that makes this team work. Thank you.

[Manager name]

Version 2: Team recognition

SUBJECT Shout-out: [Employee first name] and [project]

Hi team,

I want to recognize [Employee full name] for [specific work].

What happened: [Two or three sentences describing the situation and what they did].

Why it matters: [The result for customers, the team, or the company].

[First name], thank you. [Optional: a small reward, such as lunch on us or an extra afternoon off.]

[Manager name]

Subject lines to try

- Thank you for [specific work]
- Shout-out: [Employee first name] and [project]
- Recognizing [First name]'s work on [Project]
- A thank-you from [Manager name]
- What [First name] did this week

How to personalize it

- Describe the action and the result, not just a trait.
- Send it within a few days while the work is fresh.
- Ask whether the person prefers public or private recognition.
- Spread recognition across roles, including quieter ones.

Mistakes to avoid

- Recognizing the same few people every time.
- Generic praise that could apply to anyone.
- Pairing recognition with a request for more work in the same email.
- Recognizing overwork in a way that sets an unhealthy standard.

Legal and compliance notes

Cash and gift cards given as rewards are taxable wages, regardless of amount, and should go through payroll. Small, occasional non-cash items, such as a team lunch or a coffee mug, are usually excludable as de minimis fringe benefits. For nonexempt employees, a bonus tied to performance may need to be included in the regular rate for overtime.

When to send it

Within a week of the work. Recognition delayed until the annual review loses most of its effect. Many managers block 15 minutes on Friday afternoon to write one or two of these.

| Before you hit send

- The subject line says what changed and when, and it reads well on a phone.
- Managers were briefed and can answer questions the same day.
- Anyone personally affected heard the news privately first.
- The effective date and any action required appear in the first three lines.
- Employees without company email will get it through managers, texts, or posters.

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