

# Caregiver Recognition

A Practical Toolkit for  
Recognizing and  
Supporting Your Team



# Introduction

Every senior living operator knows how far a little appreciation goes.

When caregivers feel recognized, they're more likely to stay motivated, support one another, continue delivering great care, and remain in their roles for a long time.

The challenge is that recognition can easily get pushed aside when communities get busy.

This checklist is designed to help leaders make recognition a regular part of everyday work with simple, practical ideas that don't require a big budget or a lot of extra time.

## 01 Take a Look at How You Recognize Caregivers Today

Many communities recognize caregivers in different ways, but without a clear approach, recognition can become inconsistent.

### How to best review your current approach:

- ☐ Review whether recognition is happening consistently or only after major accomplishments, events, or milestones.
- ☐ Determine if all departments and shifts are being acknowledged, including those who work evenings, nights, and weekends.
- ☐ Ask caregivers what kinds of recognition actually matter to them. Some may value public recognition in a team meeting, while others would rather receive a handwritten note or a quick one-on-one conversation.
- ☐ Notice which moments get people talking. Is it a birthday celebration? A handwritten note from a leader? A shout-out during a shift huddle? Do more of what resonates.
- ☐ Check to see if great work is going unnoticed, like mentoring a new caregiver, stepping in to help another department, calming an anxious resident, or picking up an extra shift.

## 02 Recognize Great Work in the Moment

Recognition has the greatest impact when it happens regularly and close to the moment, not just during annual events or special occasions.

### How to build recognition into daily routines:

- ☐ Recognize caregivers during shift huddles, team meetings, and one-on-one conversations.
- ☐ Be specific about what a caregiver did and why it mattered. Instead of saying, "Thanks for everything you do," try, "Thank you for sitting with Mrs. Lynch after dinner yesterday. She was having a difficult evening, and you made sure she felt safe and cared for."
- ☐ Highlight compliments from residents or family members. Read them during team meetings, post them in the break room, or share them in a broader team message so everyone can celebrate great care.
- ☐ Celebrate everyday moments, like stepping in to help a teammate, comforting an anxious resident, mentoring a new caregiver, or staying late to make sure someone was supported.
- ☐ Ensure night shifts, weekend teams, dining, housekeeping, maintenance, and nursing all have opportunities to be celebrated.

## 03 Encourage Caregivers to Recognize Each Other

Caregivers work closely together every day, and some of the most meaningful moments come from teammates who understand the work firsthand.

### How to create peer recognition opportunities:

- ☐ Create a simple way for caregivers to recognize one another, such as a nomination form, recognition board, or team meeting shout-outs.
- ☐ Encourage caregivers to spotlight teammates for stepping in during a busy shift, helping orient a new employee, supporting a resident through a difficult moment, or simply making someone else's day easier.
- ☐ Read peer nominations during staff meetings, post them on a recognition board, or include them in your internal newsletter.
- ☐ Make participation simple and practical for busy teams.
- ☐ Include every department and shift so all caregivers have the opportunity to participate.

## 04 Make The Moments Matter

It doesn't need to be expensive or complicated to make caregivers feel valued.

**How to create simple, affordable ways to show appreciation:**

- ☐ Write handwritten thank-you notes that recognize specific contributions.
- ☐ Celebrate birthdays, work anniversaries, certifications, and personal milestones (in addition to everyday celebrations).
- ☐ Share short stories during staff meetings or in your newsletter that highlight moments of compassion, teamwork, or going above and beyond for a resident or coworker.
- ☐ Surprise the team with coffee during a busy morning, provide donuts after a challenging week, or leave a handwritten note in a caregiver's locker.
- ☐ In addition to everyday moments, create traditions your team looks forward to, like Employee of the Month, birthday breakfasts, free lunch Fridays, and celebrating work anniversaries.

## 05 Measure What Is Working

Recognition efforts are strongest when you understand what caregivers value and continue improving over time.

**How to best temperature check your team:**

- ☐ Ask caregivers if they feel appreciated and recognized, and if not, invite them to explain why.
- ☐ Ask questions like, "When was the last time you felt appreciated at work?" or "What's one thing we could do more often to recognize great work?"
- ☐ Ensure all teams, departments, and shifts are being included.
- ☐ Pay attention to participation. Are people writing peer nominations? Do caregivers look forward to recognition activities? If participation is low, ask why.
- ☐ If something isn't working, don't force it. Adapt.

# Looking Back

Recognizing caregivers is not about adding another task to an already busy day. It's about building small habits that remind caregivers their work matters, and that we appreciate them.

The best efforts are consistent, personal, and meaningful. They don't require a large budget or complicated program; just leaders who take the time to notice and celebrate great work.

## REMEMBER

A little appreciation goes a long way.



