

# Ask your direct reports what they are most proud of doing at work in the past six months

## Why do it?

This simple question can yield a treasure trove of insights into what matters to your direct reports — and how they feel about their work. Ask it as part of a performance review or periodically in 1-on-1s to zoom out from day-to-day topics. Armed with your direct reports' answers, you'll be in a better position to give them meaningful recognition and adjust their work to make it even more fulfilling.



"Before we move on, does anyone else want to take a selfie with the fourth quarter earnings?"

## How to do it:

### 1. Ask each direct report ***"What are you most proud of doing in the past six months here?"***

Some direct reports will give a clear answer right away. If you get a generic response like "Solving problems" or "Working with other teams," draw out specifics by asking open-ended questions like *"Which problems?"* or *"Which teams?"* or *"In what way?"* And follow-up with, *"Why did that make you proud?"* to be sure you understand what's driving each person's answer.

### 2. Consider how each person's response reflects their job satisfaction.

For example, if someone says they're proud of doing a core part of their job (e.g., helping customers find what they need, landing a big sale, or developing a new feature), that's a great sign that they feel connected to their work and motivated to do it. Other answers may indicate pride in overcoming a challenge (e.g., improving a poor working relationship) or learning a new skill — strong signals that the person feels they're making progress.

Fluffy or evasive answers (e.g., “A high score playing ping-pong with co-workers” or “Oh, the usual”) could mean that they haven't found their recent work very fulfilling — a signal that you need to start a larger conversation about how to [better connect their work with what motivates them](#).

### **3. Use what you learn to give each direct report recognition and future work that's meaningful to them.**

For example, if your direct report says, “I'm proud of the report that I worked on with marketing for the Trax project,” and that collaboration enabled a successful project launch, consider options like:

- Sending a congratulatory email to the direct report and their marketing counterparts on the Trax launch and copying the head of your department.
- Giving recognition in the moment when you notice the person doing similar work (e.g., *“That kind of collaboration makes our marketing materials so much better for clients”*).
- Adjusting how you delegate a project so that your direct report has the opportunity to work with the marketing team again.
- Asking the person how they might make an even bigger impact on the next project and suggesting new roles and assignments accordingly.

### **More on retaining your team:**

- [17 common warning signs a direct report may be dissatisfied \(and what to do about it\)](#)
- [3 signs your team loves working for you](#)
- [4 big — and often buried — reasons why good employees quit](#)