



OPERATOR GUIDE

How to Gamify Staff Without Demotivating Them

What the research says points and leaderboards actually do, where they backfire, and the rules that keep scoring fair on a hospitality floor.

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Points, streaks and leaderboards are easy to add and easy to get wrong. Done badly they turn a team into a ranking and push the slower half out of the door. Done well they make the invisible work visible and give managers a fair basis for recognition. This guide covers what the research actually shows, where scoring backfires on a hospitality floor, and the rules Skorops was built around.

What the research says, honestly

The most cited review of gamification studies, by Hamari, Koivisto and Sarsa, looked at the empirical evidence and concluded that gamification does produce positive effects, but that those effects depend heavily on the context in which it is used and on the users themselves.¹ In plain terms: it works, sometimes, for some people, and the design decides which.

A more specific experiment by Mekler and colleagues tested points, levels and leaderboards one element at a time. Compared with a control group, the game elements did not significantly change how competent people felt or their intrinsic motivation, but points, and especially levels and leaderboards, did produce a significantly higher volume of work. The authors concluded that in their setting these elements functioned as extrinsic incentives, effective for promoting performance quantity.²

That is the whole story in two studies. Scoring reliably raises how much gets done. It does not, on its own, make people care more. If you want both, you pair scoring with the things that do build motivation: feeling competent, having some control, and being recognised by people who matter.

Operator translation. A leaderboard will get the closing checklist finished more often. It will not make anyone love closing. Recognition, coaching and fairness do that, and the scores give you the specifics to do them well.

Where scoring backfires on a hospitality floor

1. **Ranking on speed.** If the fastest close wins, corners get cut and the fridge log gets faked. Score completion and quality; never score time-to-finish.
2. **One public leaderboard, all the time.** The top three enjoy it. The bottom third stop looking, and then stop trying. Some research on rankings suggests that people who are consistently near the bottom disengage, which is the opposite of what you want from your newest staff.
3. **Points without proof.** If a tick is worth points and nobody checks, ticks become free. The scoreboard loses credibility with the honest people first.
4. **Individual scores in a team job.** A bar close is a two-person job. Scoring only individuals rewards the person who grabs the high-point tasks and leaves the floor to their partner.
5. **Prizes that dwarf the work.** A big cash prize for the monthly winner turns colleagues into competitors and makes losing feel expensive. Keep rewards small, frequent and mostly social.
6. **Ignoring the law.** In some jurisdictions, named performance rankings visible to the whole team count as employee monitoring and carry obligations. Check yours before you make rankings public.

Seven rules for scoring that motivates

1. Score the standard, not the speed

Every task carries a point value that reflects how much it matters, not how long it takes. The float count and the lock-up walk are worth the most. A task is complete when it is done to standard and, where required, photo-proofed. Time is recorded for the manager; it is never the score.

2. Require proof where a tick is not evidence

Photo proof on the till, the closed bar, the finished room and the safety checks. It takes five seconds, and it means a point is earned only with evidence. This is what keeps the honest people believing the board.

3. Show three views, not one

Individual score (for the person and the manager), team score (for everyone) and personal-best streaks (for the person). Personal bests are the part most operators skip and the part that keeps the slower half engaged: beating your own record is always possible; beating the star closer often is not.

4. Choose who sees the ranking

The default should not be "everyone, always." Team-only or manager-only ranking views are the right choice for many teams, especially mixed teams of staff and volunteers, and they are the safer choice wherever employee monitoring rules apply. Make the choice deliberately.

5. Recognise in specifics, weekly

Two minutes at the start of the week: "Ana closed six nights, every photo in, and her handover caught the boiler fault." The score gives you the fact; saying it out loud gives the fact its value. This is the step that converts quantity into motivation.

6. Coach from the data, privately

A low score is a conversation, not a punishment. Usually it finds a task that is unclear, a time slot that is wrong or a tool that is missing. Fix the list first, then the person.

7. Keep rewards small, frequent and mostly social

First pick of shifts. A named shout-out on the board. The weekend deep clean skipped once. Small rewards keep the scoreboard about pride rather than money, and they can be given every week.

Point values that work on a hospitality floor

A workable scale is 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25, with the meaning fixed and written on the wall:

- **5: routine.** Restock the maps, post the activities board, wipe the tables. Skipped once, nobody notices.
- **10: guest-facing.** Breakfast setup, common area walk, handover notes. Skipped once, a guest notices.
- **15: cash, keys and evidence.** Float count, key reconciliation, photo of the closed bar. Skipped once, a manager has a hard conversation.
- **20 to 25: safety and the unpleasant essentials.** Smoke detector test, bed bug check, gas off. Skipped once, the consequence is not recoverable.

Keep the scale short. A list with values from 1 to 100 invites haggling. Five levels with clear meanings are understood by a new arrival in a minute, and they make the weekly score a fair reflection of what mattered, not of how many small tasks someone hoovered up.

Rolling it out without a revolt

- **Week 1: checklists only.** Points exist but nobody is ranked. Staff learn the lists and the photo proof. Fix everything that is unclear.
- **Week 2: team score and personal bests.** Show the team total and each person's own streak. Recognise the first improvements in specifics.
- **Week 3: individual view, private.** Each person sees their own score and the manager sees everyone's. Coach from it.
- **Week 4: decide on the ranking.** Ask the team. Some want it; some do not. Team-only ranking is a good compromise. Whatever you pick, say why.

Signs it is working, and signs it is not

WORKING	NOT WORKING
Completion rate rises across the whole team, not just the top three	Top three rise, everyone else flat or falling
Photos improve; fewer "it was done when I left" disputes	Photos get lazy; ticks without evidence appear

WORKING

NOT WORKING

Staff mention personal bests unprompted

Staff mention the ranking, usually to complain

Managers recognise in specifics weekly

Managers only look at the board when something goes wrong

If you see the right-hand column, step back a week in the rollout. Scoring is a tool for making good work visible. When it stops doing that, the fix is the design, not the people.

Sources

1. Hamari, J., Koivisto, J. and Sarsa, H., "Does Gamification Work? A Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Gamification," Proceedings of the 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS), 2014, pp. 3025-3034. doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.377

2. Mekler, E. D., Bruhlmann, F., Tuch, A. N. and Opwis, K., "Towards understanding the effects of individual gamification elements on intrinsic motivation and performance," Computers in Human Behavior, vol. 71, 2017, pp. 525-534. doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.08.048

Sources verified September 24, 2026. This guide is operational advice from operators, not legal advice. Employee monitoring rules differ by country; confirm yours before publishing named rankings.

See your team's first scoreboard in 20 minutes

Start a trial, load a checklist, and watch scores update as the shift runs. Individual, team and personal-best views are built in.

skorops.com/register

Free 14-day trial. Unlimited staff, no per-seat fees. Hostels and boutique stays from \$100/month (up to 50 beds, priced by bed count). Bars, restaurants and cafes from \$197.99/month per location. Pay annually and save 10 percent. Exact price shown at signup: skorops.com/pricing.