

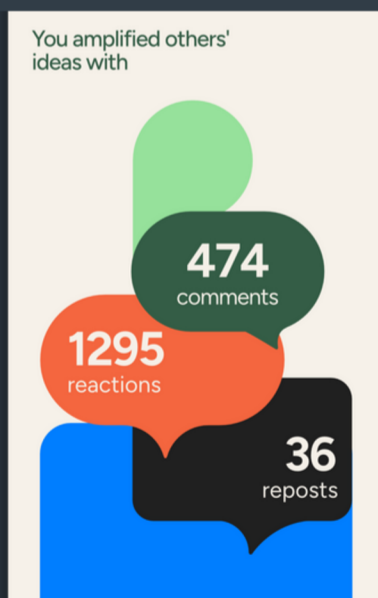
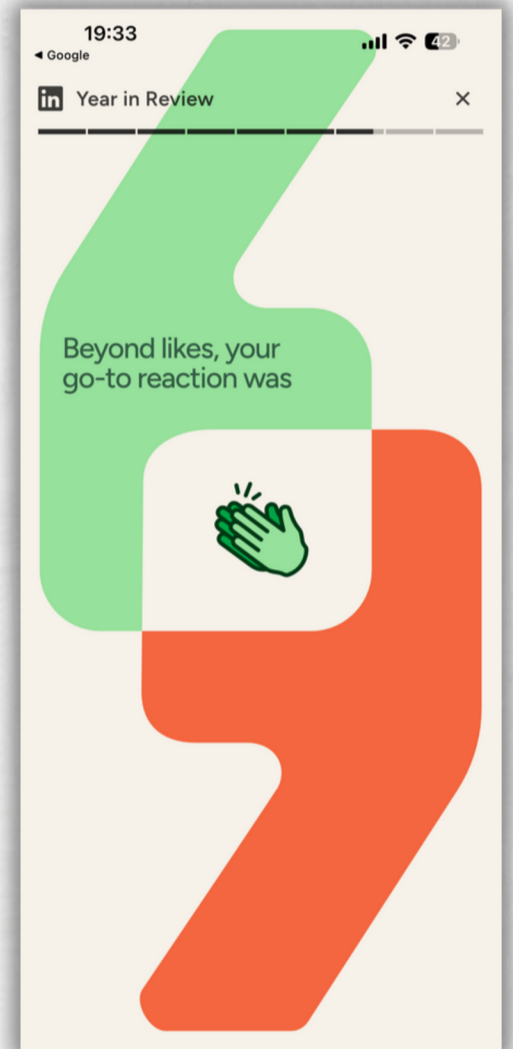
As the year came to a close, LinkedIn offered its familiar Year in Review—a recap of posts, impressions, and reactions. I glanced through it quickly, expecting nothing more than a snapshot of activity. But one small detail lingered longer than the rest: my most-used reaction was not the 👍 (like) button. It was 🙌 (celebrate). ***Yes, that is correct, you don't have to read that again.*** Jason Van Nus, who thinks that 'realism' and 'pessimism' are synonyms, and who also suffers from both, used the 🙌 reaction the most in 2025!

That realization prompted a deeper reflection, not about social media mechanics, algorithms, or design choices, but about how we choose to show up for one another in our CTE and WBL communities.

The 👍 button has its place. It signals acknowledgment and agreement, and in many cases, it is an appropriate response. Yet, over time, I have come to see it as a largely passive form of engagement. Unintentionally, it can communicate, "I appreciate what you are doing, but I am not involved in it." By contrast, the 🙌 and 🤝 (support) reactions carry a different weight. They suggest shared ownership and a sense of stakeholderhood—an implicit message that says, "This matters, and I am invested in its success." The difference between a stakeholder and a spectator is not insignificant.

This distinction feels particularly important at this moment in the evolution of CTE and Work-Based Learning. Over the past year, we have witnessed a convergence of momentum at the national level that has been building for some time. Employer demand has intensified, apprenticeships and paid work experiences have moved into the national conversation, and student outcomes are increasingly measured not just in credits earned but in wages, skills, and economic impact.

CTE is no longer making a case for national relevance; ***our significance is now understood.*** We have proof of concept and have demonstrated our necessity. We are no longer in an experimental phase; the data exists and cannot be ignored. On the national scale, the days of anonymity for CTE are behind us. But individually, in the small corners and pockets of our country, there may still be a struggle with CTE being seen as peripheral or tangential...and this is why we are at a tipping point.



The time of playing defense for CTE has passed. It is now time to play offense. ***We must push forward toward solidifying market saturation, where CTE is not on a pendulum arc, momentarily suspended in a position of relevance.*** Instead, let us strive to reach a level of permanence, expectation, and trust that does not recede when attention shifts elsewhere, and where CTE & WBL are embedded so deeply into education and workforce systems that value is assumed, sustained, and no longer subject to cycles of rediscovery.

Moments like this, however, require more than visibility. ***Momentum does not sustain itself through observation alone. It requires intentional stewardship.*** If left unattended, even the strongest movements risk plateauing. What determines whether progress compounds or dissipates is not policy language or funding alone, but the collective posture of the people within the system—educators, coordinators, employers, and advocates alike.

One of the persistent challenges in our field is the tendency toward siloed engagement. It is easy, and often comfortable, to interact primarily within our own districts, states, or professional circles. We applaud programs that resemble our own and follow conversations that feel familiar. **While this keeps us informed, it does little to advance alignment or shared purpose.** CTE and Work-Based Learning will not reach their full potential through isolated excellence. Sometimes it is necessary to work in a silo, but let's resist the urge to let them frame our engagement. Our work will advance when we collaborate, share the lift, and recognize that progress in one community strengthens the system as a whole.

This reflection has led me to think differently about how we engage—especially in public spaces where stories, successes, and struggles are shared. A 🍏 reaction to a student's milestone, or a 🤝 reaction to an educator navigating challenges, is a small but visible way of signaling that their work is not happening in isolation. It moves us from passive approval to active encouragement. It turns engagement into advocacy, however modest that step may seem.

This mindset is exactly what played out as I shared this article with colleagues and friends in the CTE community—as I always do—before publishing. I asked for thoughtful feedback, meaningful insight, pushback, and error analysis. I got exactly what I asked for... and just a bit more.

Alli Dahl talked about amplifying voice through collaboration. Jeremy Smith pointed out two favorite lines and caught a typo. Kristy Volesky offered feedback and followed up with a question about the difference between the 🤝 reaction on Facebook and LinkedIn. That led me to ask whether I should define each emoji at the beginning of the article, since platforms interpret them differently, or even include a legend—like on a map. This is how our conversations usually go.

Then, as only friends can, they had a little fun.

Kristy proposed that a proper follow-up post would be a graphic novel depicting me, acting out each emoji, titled, 'How Would Jason Respond?' The group responded with laughing emojis, and I assumed that was the end of it—until Jeremy posted the graphic to the right, just a few minutes later.

What came next was a flood of laughing-tear emojis and more than a few exclamation reactions. I laughed—hard and out loud. When that subsided, I realized I was still smiling and genuinely thankful. Why? Because this organic moment aptly underscored the very point of this article. Our work in CTE is strengthened through relationships. Real engagement includes celebration, support, insight, and occasionally a gentle roast. If we can challenge ideas, affirm one another, and laugh together, we are doing more than 🍏'ing the movement—we are participating in a shared mission.



-Peer review - CTE Style-

As we move into a new year, I see this as a quiet but meaningful challenge to our community. Not a resolution, but an invitation. An invitation to be more intentional about how we acknowledge one another's work, to amplify successes beyond our own silos, and to stand alongside those who are building programs, partnerships, and pathways that benefit students and employers alike. In a field defined by relationships, 🤝 & 🤝 are not superficial gestures; they are part of the infrastructure.

I still use the 👍 button, and I always will. But when a post represents progress, courage, or genuine impact—when it reflects the kind of work that moves CTE and Work-Based Learning forward—I choose to 🤝. I choose to 🤝.


In this moment of momentum, those small choices signal something larger: that we are not merely observing this movement, but helping carry it forward...together. And that is worth 🤝'ing!

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