

3 Reasons Workplace Friendships Are Worth the Risk (and 3 Ways to Support Them)

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“For our sake—to feel less burned out by our work (and therefore feel more energy when we’re away from work), we would be wise to foster supportive friendships at the very places where we need to protect ourselves from the effects of stress.” – Shasta Nelson, *The Business of Friendship*

When you entered the workforce, family members, teachers, or mentors might have warned you about the dangers of workplace friendships. Forming personal relationships, at work or otherwise, always brings risk. You and your buddy might disagree, and that can lead to conflict. But an increasing body of research shows the benefits of workplace friendships outweigh the risks. Here’s a look at why workplace friendships make a difference, and some ways managers can support them.

Why Workplace Friendships Matter

1. **Workplace friendships improve the emotional health of your team.** Research from Gallup shows that it became more important to have a best friend at work since the pandemic began. Many people had traumatic experiences at work and personally during COVID. Social and emotional support from work friends became more important than ever. Employees without a best friend at work became more isolated.
2. **Employees who have a best friend at work get more done.** If an employee has a best friend at work, they are significantly more likely to engage with clients and colleagues, do more work in less time, support workplace safety with fewer accidents and incidents, innovate, and share ideas.
3. **Employees who have a best friend at work are more satisfied with their jobs and less likely to leave their organizations.** Even the best jobs have tasks and time periods that feel like a slog. Those get harder to bear when you don’t have meaningful relationships or interesting activities to help fill the day. Gallup found that 44 percent of employees who have a workplace best friend would recommend their organization as a great place to work, compared with 21 percent of employees who don’t have a work best friend.

How Managers Can Support Workplace Friendships

Schedule social events with no work agenda where employees can connect. You can’t (and shouldn’t) force employees to make friends at work, but you should offer the opportunity. Social events don’t have to be mandatory, but they must be inclusive. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to attend by offering options for remote workers and scheduling events during work hours. Consider team-building volunteer opportunities. Acknowledge that social events might sometimes feel a little forced, that they may not be perfect, and that they will take staff time to organize. Commit to invest the effort, and solicit feedback on what kinds of events team members prefer.

Mix up cliques. Promote collaboration and head off the development of factions by giving different groups of employees opportunities to work together. Don’t boast about your ‘open door policy’ unless you are leaving

your office door and plenty of space on your calendar for employees to pop in without going through a formal process for a touch base conversation. Opportunities to get an issue addressed rather than just grouse about it to co-workers will help counter some tendencies for gossip and create a more collegial environment.

Offer mentoring or work buddy programs. Mentoring pairs one employee with another to help them learn skills and develop career paths, while work buddies can help a new employee make connections. Both of these types of programs provide an opportunity for meaningful professional connection and growth paths that are available to all employees. This can lead to the development of long-lasting connections among team members.

Additional Resources

- *The Business of Friendship*, by Shasta Nelson
- [The Increasing Importance of a Best Friend at Work – Gallup](#)
- [Friends at Work: Good or Bad for Business? – Insperity](#)