



Collaboration and friendships at work.

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Introduction.

Getting along with your colleagues and working well together is an important part of fostering a healthy, happy workplace. Here we explore workplace friendships – including the highs and lows – and think about how you can improve collaboration within your team.



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Friendships
at work

Nurturing healthy
friendships at work

Collaboration
at work



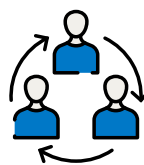
Friendships at work, and why they're important

On the whole, we are social creatures – we thrive off interaction with other people. Without it, we feel lonely and isolated. What's more, our ability to connect with people allows us to build up social networks that we can rely on to help us enjoy the good times and survive the bad. Whether it's emotional or financial support that we need, our friends are there to help and guide us.

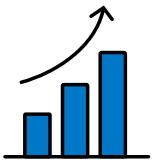
The concept of having 'social capital' helps us to thrive. So, it's only natural that we might want to encourage this connection in the workplace. In fact, friendships at work have been seen to:



**help improve employees'
job satisfaction**



**reduce turnover
within organisations**



**increase performance
and productivity**



**improve teamwork and
decision-making**

Challenges of workplace friendships

Despite the many benefits, close friendships at work may have their flaws. If you or your employees are both friends and co-workers, there may be times where this dual-role relationship is hard to manage. And, just as we can develop great friendships at work, they can also sometimes breakdown. In this situation, employees not only lose a friend but the support that comes with that relationship.

Remote working friendships

Since the pandemic, working practices have changed, with hybrid working between the office and home set to stay. While this can bring benefits, such as flexibility to manage work with other responsibilities, it's important to be mindful of the less desirable effects. For example, if people feel socially isolated, this can lead to mental health problems and effects on their general lifestyle and work-life balance. So, when planning how to foster collaborative social working relationships, it's important to factor in remote working.



How to nurture healthy friendships at work

Consider the following to help your colleagues and workplace develop healthy friendships.

- **Encourage conversation.** Make sure you have communal areas, such as a kitchen or break room, where colleagues can interact and catch up. If colleagues work remotely, suggest that they make time to catch up with individuals as they would if they were office-based. If they don't live near each other, encourage regular catch-ups over the telephone or via video conferencing. Encourage your employees to start video calls a few minutes early so those who would like a chat have the opportunity before talking business.
- **Carve out time** when your team, or individuals at your organisation, can get together. Organise a walk where you can get to know the local area and your colleagues at the same time, or a team event. If your team works remotely and you're split over different geographical areas, arrange a team event to get together once in a while to keep relationships strong. Failing that, arrange team-building activities that can be done online.
- **Share stories and updates** with each other regularly, whether in person or by video chats. Whether it's a piece of particularly exciting news or simply a lowdown on your weekend, these updates may help colleagues to feel more connected and get to know each other better. It's thought that having deeper more substantive conversations over general small talk makes people happier.
- **Structure tasks** to encourage employees to work together. Instead of working in silo, create interdependent tasks that require teams to share resources and responsibility.
- **Lead by example** and make social interaction and wellbeing the norm. If you eat lunch at your desk, your employees may do the same. Take time out of your working day to eat lunch with someone else or a group of colleagues. Why not try lunch roulette, where willing participants are allocated a 'lunch date' at random? And if you can't take the full lunch break, simply catch up for a coffee. If your team aren't always together physically, share your lunch or a coffee over a video chat.



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Collaboration at work

Not everyone wants a work bestie – and that's OK. But it's important for your team to be able to collaborate and work well together.

Psychological safety plays an important role in this. It's the concept of feeling comfortable enough to share ideas and thoughts without fear of judgement. In the work environment, it enables colleagues to feel safe to speak up. This allows for better innovation, problem solving and overall higher performance.

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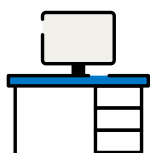
Examples:

If a colleague comes to you with a mistake, check-in with yourself before you respond. Replace blame with curiosity and a learning mindset. Try not to react negatively. Instead focus on the positives. Errors provide us with an opportunity to learn

If a colleague comes to you with their thoughts or an idea, try not to dismiss their input. Actively appreciate their contribution by thanking them. This is especially important if they're speaking up about a situation that is unmanageable, such as a tight deadline. Or perhaps they've voiced concern with a particular project or way of working. Ask your team for their input and don't be afraid to demonstrate your own vulnerabilities by admitting when you're wrong or feeling under pressure.

A few collaboration tips

Psychological safety is just one piece of the puzzle. Other key tips to help collaboration in your workplace include the following.



Interdependent tasks and projects are important

To facilitate effective collaboration, make sure goals and objectives are set out from the start, and that an individuals' responsibilities are clearly defined and visible to others.



Put your customer or business aim at the heart of what you do

Do research through focus groups and share this with your employees. This means everyone is focussed on what you need to do to meet the needs of your customers, and how best to achieve this.



Trust is crucial for collaboration.

Develop an environment where individuals trust in each other's capabilities and approach. This can help you and your colleagues to share and debate ideas in a safe space.

Collaboration is very powerful within an organisation. It allows expertise from around your business to come together to tackle key challenges. Your employees represent a pool of talent that works better together than apart. So try and encourage collaboration to help drive excellence and innovation in your business.

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