

Why You Need a Work Best friend

Author: Fadzai Danha . March 2020

Do you have a best friend at work? Donald Clifton, the former educational psychologist who founded Gallup, insisted on measuring workplace friendships for good reason; It's one of the strongest predictors of productivity. The 2019 Zimbabwe National Employee engagement benchmarking report revealed relationships with work colleagues to be 84%. This suggests that on average, 8 in every 10 of the Zimbabwean organisations` staff are happy with their relationships with workmates. It may safely be assumed that most Zimbabweans are friends with their workmates. But what difference does having a work best friend make? For a variety of reasons, it can make all the usual politics, challenges, and day to day ups and downs easier to navigate and thrive in. It can also deepen a friendship as you get the chance to do what you're best at with someone you enjoy spending time with.

A survey by job site Comparably found that of over 33,000 workers across the tech industry, more than half of them report having best friends at work. While 60 percent of women said they have a close friend at work, 56 percent of men admitted having work best friends as well.

According to Gallup having a work best friend is one of the most important keys to engagement and happiness at work. Their research has consistently shown an indisputable link between having a best friend at work and the amount of effort employees expend in their job. For example, Gallup found that women who strongly agree they have a best friend at work are more than twice as likely to be engaged (63%) compared with the women who say otherwise (29%).

Gallup also found that those who have a best friend at work are seven times as likely to be engaged in their jobs, are better at engaging customers, produce higher quality work, have higher well-being and are less likely to get injured on the job.

Gallup found that women who strongly agree they have a best friend at work feel:

- Less likely to be actively looking or watching for job opportunities
- More connected with their coworkers, knowing what is expected of them and trusting their integrity and ethics
- More likely to have a positive experience during the day, such as enjoying what they do, making more progress and getting recognized for successes
- Less likely to report having a negative experience during the day such as worry, stress and feeling tired

Linkedin also found that having a work best friend can yield the following benefits:

- Especially for younger staa (age 18-24), it improves their happiness, motivation, and productivity.

- A 3rd of Millennials believe that socializing and friendships are important to moving up the career ladder.
- 51% of workers stay in touch with their former colleagues, which can lead to boomerang employees, or in bad environments more turnover.

This phenomenon is mostly present amongst millennials with some Gen X and Baby Boomer managers struggling with the idea that millennials have blurred the line between work and life outside work.

Now that we know the statistics behind the value of a best friend at work, let's explore why having a work best friend matters.

1) A best friend at work gives you someone to look forward to seeing

Having someone you look forward to seeing can make it easier to get through a tough project, challenging time at your company, or just be excited to get to the office a little earlier.

2) A work best friend gives you someone to talk with and who will listen

- **Get a big win, or finish a big task?** Your work best friend will be there to give you a high five.
- **Struggling with a colleague or boss?** Your work best friend will listen and empathize.

While any friend can listen and celebrate with you, only a co-worker understands context.

3) A best friend at work can help you check yourself

While any co-worker can give you feedback, your best friend at work is most likely to help you catch yourself before making a mistake. Most importantly, if they're a best friend, you're also much more likely to *listen to them*.

Feedback from your boss or an adversary can sometimes feel politically motivated, but when it's your friend it carries meaning. You know they want the best for you.

How to find a best friend at work:

- **Focus on rapport:** Look for someone with shared interests and a similar career stage to connect with.
- **Take advantage of easy social situations:** Work happy hours, inviting someone along for lunch, community service events, etc
- **Take your time:** Building any friendship takes time, and you won't click with everyone. Have fun and use it as an easy way to get to know your coworkers.

Tactics your company can use to encourage friendship amongst your co-workers:

- **Organize social events:** Take the team to lunch, go out for drinks after a big project finishes, go

do community service together, etc.

- **Make time for small talk:** If you have a remote team, it's important to give people a chance to get to know each other. Making time for small talk in meetings can help people learn more about each other to start to build connections.
- **Encourage Peer 1 on 1s:** It's a chance to improve collaboration and may blossom a friendship as they happen semi-regularly. Encourage casual conversation as part of it

Research shows that, after food and shelter, belonging is a fundamental human need. Given that we spend between 8 and 9 hours of our day at work we have significantly less time to fulfill our social needs outside of work. The workplace, where we spend such a large portion of our time, is an ideal place to foster the positive connections we all need, not just for our well-being but also for our productivity and health. While some people will always be hesitant to make friends at work, for these or other reasons, social connection *is* a basic human need. All friendships have hard moments. Work friendships just have different ones.

According to a Gallup poll, those who had a best friend at work were 43% more likely to report having received recognition and praise for their work in the last week. There were several other areas where a best friend improved performance, such as being recognized for their progress, having their opinions count at work, and having the opportunity to do what they do best every day. This is why finding yourself a work best friend matters.

Fadzai Danha is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or email: fadzai@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipcconsultants.com

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