

## **Introduction**

Work is a central part of most people's lives. On top of being the most important contributor to financial well-being, work is a place where we learn, socialize and build relationships. So, career and working life play a significant part in how we develop as adults. Mental, emotional and social well-being at work are core components of our overall well-being.

**Strategy: *Take time to get to know colleagues at work and /or join a relevant group or association to meet new people in your industry.***

Although we might think that working and socializing don't mix, social relationships are actually a vital part of a healthy and productive workplace. Research by the Gallup Organization found that people who said they had a "best friend" at work were more engaged in their jobs than people without a best friend at work. Another study of employees in a large telecommunications company found that workers who frequently do favours for co-workers and get lots of favours in return, were more productive than people who did not exchange favours with co-workers (Flynn).

These findings help to explain why good relationships and friendships can contribute to workplace morale, effective teamwork, sharing of information and resources. Social relationships can also increase people's chances of getting assistance and support when they need it and can also contribute to career advancement. As psychologist, Dr. Steven Stein notes in his book, *Make Your Workplace Great*, "Getting support from and being able to rely on the people you work with makes work more productive. When people actually care about each other, they're more willing to help when needed." In other words, connecting with your colleagues at work can enhance your effectiveness as an employee and your well-being as a person.

## **Be a Joiner**

One obvious way to get to know co-workers is to participate in work-related social events. Some examples:

- Attend workplace social functions like seasonal parties, celebration lunches, and nights out.
- Join a workplace committee that will expose you to new people.
- Participate in a workplace volunteer effort such as organizing your company's walkathon group, food drive or other fundraiser.

## **Connecting with Individual Co-Workers**

These days, workplace friends are often an important component of many people's social networks. Moreover, having friends at work makes work – which occupies so much of our time – more enjoyable.

Some people are natural “connectors” who make friends easily wherever they go. Those of us who are shyer and less outgoing by nature may need to be more strategic about setting up opportunities to get to know work colleagues. For example:

- **Ask people for advice.** Whether it’s about a work-related matter or what kind of laptop computer to buy, asking for advice is a good conversation starter. Most people are flattered when they are asked to share their knowledge and opinions.
- **Find out who shares your interests.** If there’s a bulletin board or electronic networking site in your workplace, post a note asking if anyone might be interested in going to the symphony, hiking, trading gourmet recipes, etc.
- Participate in or help organize after work social get-togethers.
- Do people favours when they ask you.
- Give genuine compliments to co-workers when they’ve done something well.
- Invite someone to lunch, or host a barbecue for your co-workers.
- Welcome new people to the workplace.

### **Don’t Push It**

Genuine friendships take time to develop. Don’t expect them to happen instantly. The goal is to set up opportunities to meet and interact with co-workers that give friendships a chance to develop naturally. It’s also important to respect the culture of your company/organization. Some workplaces are more (or less) oriented towards socializing than others.

### **Outside Professional Organizations**

Many people join professional associations in hopes of gaining information, educational opportunities and connections that can advance their careers. But professional associations are also another way to make new contacts and develop long-lasting connections and friends with people who share your work-related experiences and interests.

Ask your supervisor or colleagues if they know of any professional associations related to your type of work. Listings of Canadian associations can be found online at:

Charity Village: <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/nonpr/profas.asp#canad>

The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials:  
<http://www.cicic.ca/en/profess.aspx?sortcode=2.19.21.21>

**References:**

Ellingwood, S. "The Collective Advantage. Contrary to popular belief, workplace friendships boost profit," *Gallup Management Journal*, 2001.

Flynn, F. "How Much Should I Give and How Often? The Effects of Generosity and Frequency of Favor Exchange on Social Status and Productivity," *The Academy of Management Journal*, 2003. Web: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/30040648>

Stein, Steven J., *Make Your Workplace Great: The Seven Keys to an Emotionally Intelligent Organization*, John Wiley and Sons, 2007.