

# Workplace besties: How to build relationships at work while staying professional

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Having meaningful connections in the workplace is [essential for personal and organizational success](#). Most of us form these bonds naturally, as [we spend a significant amount of our lifetimes at work](#).

After leaving college, many people [in their 20s move to new cities for career opportunities](#), where they face the task of creating a brand new social circle from scratch. The workplace becomes an ideal place for people to connect.

Activities like grabbing drinks after work, playing [team sports](#) or just sharing meals serve as opportunities to form connections with co-workers. These interactions not only [help combat feelings of isolation](#), but also add a sense of camaraderie and support to the daily work routine.

However, as individuals reach milestones like getting married or starting a family, their priorities in life naturally shift. The enjoyed after work hangouts and casual meetups start taking a backseat to family commitments and home responsibilities.

Consequently, you might find that keeping up with work friendships becomes more challenging over time. Balancing professional growth and one's personal life often leads to a decrease in the frequency and depth of these relationships while still preserving any already-established connections.

## **Making friends at work**

There is a difference between typical co-worker relationships and true friendships. Generally speaking, people we work with are not necessarily friends. In our personal lives, it often takes years of building trust to

bring someone into our circle of friends.

Yet many of us do develop friendships with colleagues we have worked alongside—often for years. For instance, I've made friends at work whom I respect and trust immensely—one of my best friends is someone I met on the job. Our friendship continued to thrive long after I left that workplace.

That said, do I share my deepest, darkest secrets with work friends? Nope. So then, is a work friend worth it? In short, yes—even [relationships with weaker ties](#) can be beneficial. But it depends on the depth and nature of the [relationship](#).

## **The benefits of friendships at work**

Friendships can result in substantial benefits. A [2021 survey on workplace friendships and happiness](#) found that 57% of workers said having a friend at work significantly boosted job satisfaction.

Additionally, 22% of survey participants believed friendships in the workplace enhanced their efficiency. Another 21% thought these connections stimulated innovation.

When employees are happy, engaged and productive, and the organization is meeting their individual needs, they are more likely to meet their full potential.

[Connection and community are essential to the workplace](#). They help us create a sense of belonging, strengthen our psychological contracts with our employers and help drive us to be motivated and efficient. Strong relationships can facilitate communication and advice-sharing among co-workers.

However, it's important to note workplace friendships can have a downside. [Friendships at work can be problematic](#) due to rumors of relationships, nepotism and favoritism, to name a few. The concept of "work" and "play" can often conflict when [career goals](#) intersect or worse when there is a conflict. That said, many of these issues can be mitigated with clear boundaries and communication.

## **Preventing burnout**

Employees are not the only ones who benefit from workplace friends—there are also significant benefits for employers. Promoting [employee engagement](#) through a respectful and inclusive work culture, for example, [decreases employee turnover rates](#).

Employees with friends at work [are twice as likely to feel passionate about their roles](#). These individuals also tend to interact with clients, deliver high-quality work and express overall greater degrees of well-being than those without work friends.

Apart from creating a supportive atmosphere, workplace friendships lead to people being [less inclined to look for other job opportunities](#).

This element of workplace culture has become increasingly important as companies deal with the aftermath of the [Great Resignation](#), where 4.3 million Americans left their jobs in August 2021 alone.

## **Inter-generational friendships**

[Inter-generational friendships](#) are important to cultivate at work. You should consider expanding your networks to get the most out of these meaningful relationships.

However, forming friendships with supervisors can be challenging. Such relationships carry the risk of [cronyism and nepotism](#) and can undermine the integrity and effectiveness of a workplace.

[A study in the health-care sector found that health-care professionals](#) who felt unfairly treated were more likely to feel unmotivated, which impacted work performance.

This illustrates the struggle for organizations to combat perceptions of nepotism while fostering trust and camaraderie among employees. Friendships with a superior can work against personal relationships and the organization as a whole.

Instead, organizations should prioritize mentorship programs. Pairing younger employees with seasoned employees provides guidance, feedback and support, bridging the gap between individuals and the organization. Mentoring is also a great way to bridge any generational gaps.

Whether a traditional peer-on-peer program or someone taking you under their wing, the rewards are significant. About [70% of Fortune 500 companies have some mentorship program](#), which speaks to their value.

## **Dos and don'ts**

To ensure that [workplace](#) friendships are positive and don't result in consequences, there are some essential guidelines and boundaries employees should consider following.

1. Go out of your way to greet your co-workers, celebrate their accomplishments and invite them out to lunch or happy hour after work.
2. Maintain your professionalism at work, even when spending time

- with friends. Remember that your supervisor could be watching.
3. Be kind to those around you: Avoid behaviors that may exclude others and steer clear of gossip. While not everyone may naturally form friendships, maintaining a respectful attitude is key.
  4. Handle conflict maturely: If you and your work friend run into difficulty in your relationship, don't place all the blame on them or ghost them. Address issues maturely and work together to resolve them.
  5. Balance socializing with working: If your friendship is taking up too much of your time or impacting productivity, adjust how you interact at work.
  6. Don't engage in favoritism: Ensure your friendship doesn't lead to cronyism or nepotism, which can harm team dynamics and trust.
  7. Respect privacy: Don't share personal information about your work friends with other colleagues without their permission.
  8. [Clearly communicate and stick to boundaries](#) with your work friends.

Having friends at work can be a good thing—it's good for mental and [physical health](#), prevents loneliness and organizations perform better. But, like all relationships, it's important to always remember and respect boundaries.

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