

CAREERS

The benefits of fostering strong workplace relationships

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Having friends at work can do wonders for engagement and innovation so it is important for employees to find a workplace with people who suit their personality.

Even while many Australians continue to work from home to comply with social distancing restrictions, there are ways to establish or maintain friendships.

A 2018 Gallop report reveals women who have a best friend at work are more than twice as likely to be engaged in their job (63 per cent) compared with women who do not (29 per cent).

They are also less likely to be actively looking for other job opportunities; more likely to take risks that could lead to innovation; and more likely to have a positive experience during the day, such as enjoying what they do, making progress and being recognised for successes.



📷 Steve McArthur and Mark Bowman of Genea Fertility say their friendship has been beneficial in the workplace. Picture: Renee Nowytarger Photography

Meanwhile, [Culture Amp](#) people science director Chloe Hamman says people who care about each other are more likely to admit to a mistake at work.

“Why is it important to be open about mistakes? This leads to learning, quicker response to errors, less likelihood of repeat, and innovation,” she says.

Hamman says constructive feedback is also needed to allow people to do their best at work, and this too relies on positive work relationships.

[Corporate Dojo](#) founder and people leadership expert Karen Gately says having friends at work can also help with a person's longer-term career goals.

“You can also leverage those friendships to be introduced to other people in the organisation that might benefit you to learn (from), get experience (from) or be recognised for an opportunity,” she says.

“If you have got friends at work, you might be seen as a team player and somebody who can build healthy, strong relationships.

“Others are likely to see you as a suitable potential leader.”

Gately says it is still possible to build relationships while physically separated from colleagues.

“It's important we are deliberately reaching out and maintaining connections,” she says.

“Many of us will be required to attend (online) meetings but what also matters is our capacity to maintain those friendships and have conversations of a more informal nature – exploring how life is for each other and provide empathy for the challenges people are facing at this time.

“There might be certain celebrations and things happening in their life and if we are proactive in letting them know we are thinking of them and are aware and compassionate ... people will begin to feel that trust, respect and rapport.

“Zoom and phone and emails are all still valid but then also, send people a card or a note and do something a bit thoughtful and creative to let them know you care.”



📷 People leadership expert Karen Gately says people with work friends come across as team players. Picture: Supplied

Gately says it is more difficult to have “incidental interactions” that foster friendships while working remotely.

“Whether it’s end-of-week virtual drinks with the whole team or friendships groups in the workplace making an effort to come together online, you have to make it happen on purpose,” she says.

IT’S WORTH HAVING WORKMATES

Steve McArthur and Mark Bowman have been working together at [Genea Fertility](#) for 25 years, coming up through the ranks to become scientific director and medical director, respectively.

McArthur, responsible for all of Genea's labs and about 70 staff across Australia, said his earliest memory with his workmate was driving in Bowman's old Mazda and listening to an Offspring CD.

"We hit it off and worked closely and our careers developed at the same pace," he said.

"After 25 years of working together, we've conducted procedures in operating theatres together and run the whole gamut of all areas."



📷 Steve McArthur and Mark Bowman of Genea Fertility have been work friends for 25 years.
Picture: Renee Nowytarger Photography

Bowman, who is a gynaecologist and IVF specialist, said they used to “ferry embryos in little dishes” from the clinic in the city where the fertilisation happened to the day surgery in the suburbs.

Both believe their friendship has had benefits in the workplace.

McArthur says going into the office in a good frame of mind helps people see the positives when difficult situations arise.

“It also helps you be open in the workplace and talk about things in a relaxed and calm way,” he says.

Meanwhile, Bowman says the friendship allows them to more easily solve problems.

“I can sit with Steve and say, ‘What do you think about this?’,” he says.

“You troubleshoot things and come up with new ideas and you can achieve it off the cuff before you apply formally.

“Because of our friendship, a problem doesn’t become a problem because you are stopping it before it starts.”