

Teamwork: You and Your Co-Workers

Chances are during the work week, you spend more time with co-workers than you do with your family and friends. Depending on your relationships, co-workers can make your workday better or worse.

Having casual friends at work and membership on an informal team can have many advantages. Teamwork can:

- Create a supportive work environment;
- Inspire new goals and job improvement;
- Encourage development of new skills;
- Develop self-esteem;
- Provide solutions for work-related problems; and
- Increase morale.

Co-worker relationships can also have a negative impact on your job. They can:

- Decrease job productivity by socializing too much; and
- Create cliques that exclude others and encourage favoritism.

Finding the right balance is critical to reap the rewards of co-worker relationships. This article will help you create a healthy and supportive informal team, work out co-worker problems and manage friendships at work.

Encourage a Teamwork Environment

Many managers and supervisors labor to create and nurture teams in jobs that require close interaction and trust. Even if your job does not rely on this type of interaction, you can still benefit from being a member of a team. If you work together, you already have something in common, but there is still more to learn.

To foster a team environment:

- Learn about your co-workers' positions and duties. In understanding their duties in conjunction with yours, you learn how to help each other on the job and work together;
- Make meetings outside of work casual and fun. Separate yourself from any work grievances. The goal is to develop a positive atmosphere, not gossip or vent; and
- Ask your supervisor about team-building workshops or retreats that are available.

Improving Co-Worker Relations

Though you are not expected to form friendships with your co-workers, a healthy work environment is contingent on healthy co-worker relations. If you notice that you and a co-worker are experiencing unspoken or underlying conflicts, address them immediately.

Working as a team and feeling a part of this team requires members to respect, listen,

continued on Page 2



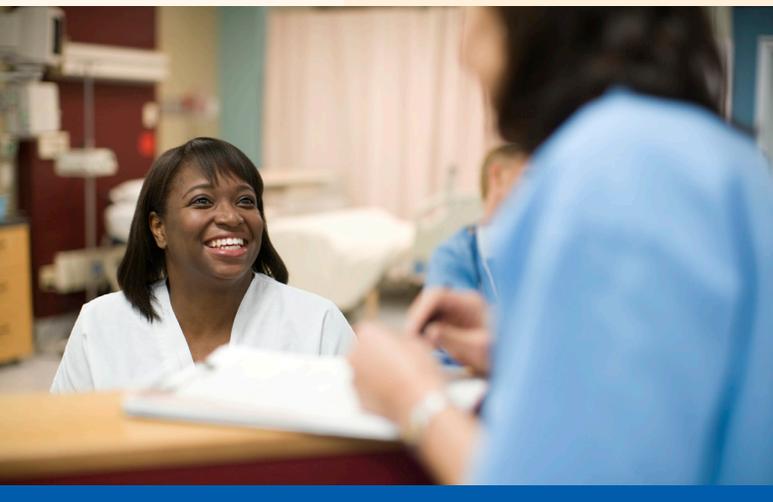
understand and trust each other. Here are some steps to help you improve strained co-worker relations:

- Recognize that your goal is to create a healthy co-worker relationship. Focus on learning how to work together, not forcing unnatural friendships;
- Agree to disagree. You and your co-worker need to learn to deal constructively with your differences and disagreements;
- Improve communication. Talk with your co-worker about different ways to communicate and treat each other. Take into consideration each other's differences and work styles;
- Build mutual understanding. Do this by talking about a problem you have with each other from different angles. Discuss perceptions of what is going on and why; and
- Directly discuss your problems. It is easy to take a passive-aggressive approach when dealing with conflict, but the problem is likely to grow larger.

By establishing a healthy work relationship with your co-worker, you open the door for future negotiations and encourage a healthy and supportive work environment.

Creating Friendships at Work

Healthy co-worker relations naturally foster teamwork and support, and sometimes these co-worker bonds can move to friendships.



Dr. Jan Yager, sociologist and author of several books about friendships, recommends that friendship at work be "casual." Casual friendships are genuine friendships but develop to a less personal, familiar level. These friendships allow you to enjoy the company of your co-workers without jeopardizing professionalism.

If you are interested in changing a work-related acquaintance to a friendship, suggest doing activities that are not work-related, such as going to a movie or dinner. In these environments, conversation naturally shifts from work to new or shared interests.

Casual friendships make work more fun and enjoyable. Co-worker friendships can provide camaraderie, inspiration and social outlets. They can help you:

- Brainstorm for ideas;
- Laugh during times of stress;
- Create contacts in the company; and
- Inspire career growth and development.

Dr. Yager has outlined some rules for maintaining casual friendships at work:

- Be an active listener;
- Show interest in your friend's personal problems as well as business interests and concerns;
- Remember your friend on holidays. You don't necessarily have to purchase gifts, but you can send a card;
- Don't share your friend's confidences at work and consider carefully what you share with others;
- Keep updated on your friend's life and keep him or her aware of your changes;
- Talk about the friendship if you sense that it is putting either of your jobs in jeopardy; and
- Find out if your company has a policy about work friendships or interactions. Follow the rules.

Words of Caution

It is comforting to have a friend nearby when you are stressed or concerned about a project, but there are downfalls in co-worker friendships. Keep these suggestions in mind:



- Limit gossiping and forming cliques. You and your friends want to encourage a positive work environment. Remember, any kind of exclusion destroys a healthy team atmosphere;
- Keep your friend's work position in mind. If you turn to your friend with work-related grievances you are placing him or her in a difficult position. Your friend may agree with you and want to support you, but by sharing certain problems you may implicate him or her in your problems;

continued on Page 3

'Teamwork' continued from Page 2

- Be professional at work. Be conscious of how your interactions affect your work and those around you; and
- Socialize during non-work hours. Although you may be tempted to tell your co-worker about the exciting events of the weekend, be aware of your work boundaries and what is appropriate. Keep your personal issues on personal time and work issues on work time.

Conclusion

Some people consider their co-workers their second family because of the substantial time they spend with them. Because working in an environment that is healthy and nurturing may influence job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, work with your co-workers to encourage a supportive team environment.

By © liveandworkwell.com. All rights reserved.

Rules for Cubicle Courtesy

Cubicles are designed to enhance interaction and help companies maximize space. But because partitioned environments lack privacy, it's critical that cube dwellers develop a healthy respect for their co-workers.

Here are 10 ways to build strong bonds and foster productivity when working with colleagues in close quarters:

Be a courteous guest.

You'd never barge into another person's house unannounced. Likewise, pretend that cubicles have front doors. Before stepping into a colleague's work area, always knock gently on the side of the entrance. This allows the individual to signal whether he or she can afford to be disturbed at the moment. Consistently show that you respect others' time and privacy, and people will return the favor.

Use your "library voice."

In today's deadline-driven workplace, professionals must be able to concentrate on completing tasks without the constant fear of distraction. There's nothing quite as annoying as someone whose voice seems to always reach a deafening level. Whenever possible, use a quiet tone so you don't disrupt others.

Curb casual conversation.

While socializing in the office is natural and a great way to build camaraderie with co-workers, not everyone may want to know about the strange blind date you had last night. It's unprofessional and unproductive to spend more than a few minutes talking about your personal life during office hours. Fill everyone in on the latest news at lunch or after work.



Feeling sick? Use caution.

Suffering from an awful cold or flu? Control those contagions. Do yourself – and your co-workers – a favor by considering to stay home until you feel better. If you absolutely must come to work, be considerate and cautious when using communal office equipment. For instance, if you use the photocopier, clean it off with a disinfectant wipe immediately after completing your project.

continued on Page 4

Have good scents.

Be mindful of your neighbors' noses before you let your tuna casserole waft through the office. Your co-workers may not share your love of a certain cologne or cranberry-scented candles, either.

Ask before borrowing.

Some people are protective of their office supplies. Respect that. Always ask for permission prior to using someone's stapler or raiding a co-worker's supply of paper clips. What may seem like no big deal to you could be regarded as bothersome or disrespectful to others.

Avoid décor disasters.

Individuality is the spice of life. But err on the side of caution when decorating your workspace. For instance, don't put up potentially offensive calendars or political posters that may alienate others. Also, think twice before posting that beach picture from your Cancun vacation.

Hit the right tune.

You may work best when the music is blasting. But that doesn't mean everyone shares the same strategy. Wear headphones whenever you listen to CDs or the radio.



And be sure not to sing or hum along to the chorus; save those melodies for your morning shower.

Be friendly.

In today's fast-paced business environment, we sometimes forget the basics of professionalism. When you are away from your cube and pass someone in the hall, say hello whether they are a friend or stranger. You both work for the same organization and you never know whose assistance you might need some day. Remember that being a good neighbor is just as important on the job as it is at home. Exhibiting courtesy, tact and empathy in the workplace will help you build productive relationships and camaraderie with colleagues.

By © Robert Half International, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

Solving Problems with Co-Workers

Conflicts with co-workers are unavoidable, but they don't have to make your life miserable. Most workplace conflicts result from poor communication or different personalities colliding. By improving your communication and problem-solving skills, you can create solutions from conflicts.

Communicate Better

Sometimes when we are tired, angry or frustrated, we don't hear what the other person is trying to tell us. To really understand your co-worker's feelings and needs, you should:

Listen, then talk.

Let your coworker share her ideas and opinions. Make eye contact and nod when you understand a point. Focus on hearing her perspective, rather than on preparing your next remark.



Ask questions.

Don't assume you know what your coworker meant or felt. Instead, ask questions that require more than "yes" or "no" answers, and don't attack in the process.

continued on Page 5

Keep an open mind.

Don't just listen for statements that back up your own opinions. Be open to your co-worker's point of view.

Don't jump to conclusions.

Don't assume you know what your co-worker is going to say next, or how the argument will end. If you don't listen carefully, you may miss an important point.

Remember body language.

Tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures often cloud a message and delay resolution. Be aware of what your body is saying to your co-worker, and vice versa.

Summarize.

When your co-worker finishes speaking, repeat what she said – in your own words – to confirm that you understand. Summarize points of agreement or disagreement.

The Problem-Solving Approach

The problem-solving approach is often the best way to resolve conflicts successfully. Follow these guidelines:

Acknowledge and discuss the problem.

Decide to discuss the issues, and then schedule a time to talk. Decide what questions to ask. Do you know what your point of view is? Do you understand your co-worker's point of view?

Agree on a solution.

Come up with as many ideas as possible and talk about the options. Keep both of your interests and needs in mind to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

Monitor results.

Decide how you will confirm that the solution is implemented. Ensure that the conflict has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Determine if anything else needs to be done.

By communicating well and using a problem-solving approach to disagreements, you will be dealing with workplace conflict in a healthy way and strengthening your professional relationships.

By © liveandworkwell.com. All rights reserved.



**OHIO EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned

about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has the use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

Share Your Comments about Frontline Focus

Your comments are important. Please share your comments about Frontline Focus via OEAP's confidential email address: OEAP@das.ohio.gov. Your comments may be published in a future edition of Frontline Focus.

800-221-6327/614-644-8545

ohio.gov/eap

Robert Blair, Director
Ohio Department of Administrative Services

Andy Bensing, *OEAP Benefits Manager*

Carrie McKean, *Administrative Professional*

OhioDAS
SERVICE · SUPPORT · SOLUTIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES