

A sociable workplace is happier and more productive. Here's why



It's not just the work you do, it's who you do it with. Image: REUTERS/Erik De Castro

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Today's workers are more engaged and stay with their companies longer if they have stronger team relationships. Work has become highly decentralized, with more employees telecommuting and collaborative tools surpassing face-to-face communication.

As a result, Gallup's [State of the Global Workplace](#) found that 85% of the global workforce is either not engaged or actively disengaged at work, costing companies approximately \$7 trillion in lost productivity.

By contrast, leaders that prioritize the socialization of their workforces see stronger team commitment and an increase in productivity and organizational health.

Millennials have for years been stereotyped as the generation of job hoppers even [though there is evidence](#) to debunk this myth. The younger you are, the more likely you are to change jobs more frequently as you try to discover yourself.

But, like baby boomers and Gen X, many millennials have stayed with a company for more than a decade, not because of the job security, but rather as a result of the relationships they have with their teammates.

A feeling of belonging

“I’ve now been at General Mills 11 years and those friendships are definitely a massive part of what keeps me here – it creates a strong feeling of belonging and affiliation,” says Michelle Odland, director of marketing for Totino's and Old El Paso at General Mills.

“My close friends here are one of the key reasons I have stayed for 11 years so far, and why I’m inclined to continue to stay,” said Jennifer Schopfer, general manager of transport logistics at GE Transportation.

Millennials view their co-workers as their work family and their manager as their work parent. It’s much harder to leave a family than a bunch of acquaintances you hardly see, don’t get along with or with whom you don’t have an emotional connection.

Every leader can, and should, focus on creating a more socially engaging work culture because it’s good for their own health and for their teams. In a [global study](#) by Future Workplace and Virgin Pulse, we asked workers how leaders could help facilitate stronger relationships at work.

Nearly half of respondents said team-building activities and social events and nearly one-third said “workations”. Only 20% said using more collaborative technologies. A proper balance of face-time with collaborative tools can keep employees connected while making them feel like they belong.

Smart companies and their leaders realize the importance of team-building activities. Workday, for example, used these to allow employees to participate in defining their own experience.

“We were able to customize the floor to be optimal for the way product management and development teams worked,” says Erin Yang, Workday’s vice-president of technology product management, who was on a steering committee that helped design a new floor of the firm’s San Francisco office. She asked her team to contribute office ideas and share them on a Pinterest board. Through this team-building activity, the space was more engaging and their relationships became stronger because they had worked on something together as a team.

Aside from team-building activities, social events can be extremely effective, fun and engaging. At HubSpot and other companies, it can be challenging to meet people in other departments. “We host quarterly dinners where execs foot the bill and lead the conversation and you dine with a mystery group of HubSpotters,” says Alison Elworthy, the vice president of customer success at Hubspot. Laura Petti, a line producer at CNBC, says they plan a quarterly team potluck around a theme like Halloween or the Super Bowl.

With [70% of people globally working remote at least once a week](#), companies are looking to find ways to engage them and make them feel like they are part of the culture. At Akamai, teams fly in to be together in person for an off-site. “This is expensive and the output needs to justify the cost, but in my experience, the value for remote workers to engage with people in person energizes their commitment to

the team and the larger organization,” says Ross Feinberg, vice president of strategy and operations at Akamai.

Leaders that create a more socially engaged workforce will be able to hold on to their teammates for longer and have a healthy culture that makes everyone excited to work, every day.

Today, work is about the actual work you do and who you do it with so it’s critical that team relationships get prioritized, not just the work itself.

Dan Schawbel is the author of [Back to Human: How Great Leaders Create Connection in the Age of Isolation](#).

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