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CAREER STRATEGIES AND INSIGHTS

A few Sundays ago, I went to the diner after church to indulge in the French toast that I was craving. As I sat enjoying my breakfast, a gentleman walked in with his two grandchildren. They were greeted by the owner in a way that suggested familiarity, and seated. After getting settled at the table, the gentleman's grandson (about 4 or 5 years old) asked his grandfather, "Are you friends with him?" – referring to the owner. His grandfather replied, "Well, I know him. I come here often." To that his grandson replied, "But are you friends?" Needless to say I was in awe of this child's ability to make the distinction between "knowing someone" and "being friends."

The exchange left me thinking about how people view their relationships at work. Do they think about the people with whom they work to impact the organization's goals as people we simply know, or as friends?

I am not blind to the haze that "friendship" can have on working relationships, particularly when it comes to direct reports. Trust also plays a critical role and boundaries should always be a consideration. But, what if you were to apply the tenets of friendship to your working relationships? How would it change the quality of communication, the degree of collaboration, and the frequency of in-person interactions versus email "conversations?" How would it impact the level of trust in organizations?

Here are a few qualities of friendship that I believe, when applied, can positively impact professional relationships.

1. **Friends keep it real.** Friends provide "gentle honesty," while sharing exactly what is on their mind. They recognize your imperfections and help you to do the same. They hold you accountable for doing better and being better.
2. **Friends appreciate one another.** Friends accept one another for who they are and appreciate the diversity of divergent thoughts, styles, and behaviors.
3. **Friends forgive.** Friends don't hold a grudge. They empathize with one another and learn to accept that sometimes it is necessary to make an unpopular decision. They are willing to talk it out and move on. Friends also expect the grace of forgiveness.
4. **Friends provide steadfast support.** A client shared that he was pleasantly surprised when one of his peers declined the opportunity to increase the headcount of his own team if it meant taking that headcount from his peer. An earlier commitment the two leaders made to support one another was a commitment he took to heart.
5. **Friends help you see the lighter side of things.** Friends use humor to relieve stress and keep things in perspective. They will infuse you with optimism when your glass is half-empty rather than half-full.
6. **Friends demonstrate caring.** Caring communicates a willingness to investment in the success and growth of others. Caring is felt when someone hears a difficult message, and asks for support rather than responding defensively. Friends assume positive intent and act in a way that reinforces that thinking.
7. **Friends celebrate success.** A client recently shared his frustration with me about his peers who always questioned the promotions others received within their peer group. Friends unselfishly celebrate one another's success. There is no room for jealousy or envy.



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8. **Friends understand the importance of boundaries.** Boundaries serve as operating principles that ensure the success of the relationship. They are explicitly articulated and firmly respected.

This list could go on for days, but I think you get the point. Move beyond simply knowing and being known. The more comfortable you become with the people you work with the greater the level of trust. More trust leads to greater transparency. Transparency lessens the opportunity for misunderstanding and promotes an environment of idea sharing and collaboration.

As an added benefit, there is research that suggests that friendship has a significant impact on psychological well-being and promotes brain health. Who couldn't use more of that?

Dr. Kym A. Harris is an executive coach and speaker, and President of Your SweetSpot Coaching and Consulting, LLC. Her belief that "competence is more than performance" is fundamental to her coaching model which is fueled by the principles of Emotional Intelligence. She guides leaders in the discovery, development, and exploitation of their more.