

## WORKERS WHO FEEL CONNECTED ARE HAPPIER ON THE JOB

BY GRETA DAVIS



When choosing careers and jobs, we tend to focus on interests (what I enjoy), skills (what I am good at), personality (what environments match my traits), and values (what is most important to me), all of which are important considerations. People often think occupational satisfaction is an outcome of effective career decision-making and that if we choose the right career based on our personal characteristics, we will be satisfied with our jobs.

However, one potentially overlooked aspect of career satisfaction is the quality of workplace relationships. The fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology provide longstanding evidence that human beings are social creatures with a strong need for social connection. Contemporary career theories, such as Blustein's Psychology of Working Theory, point to the quality of workplace relationships as an important part of job satisfaction and purpose. According to the Pew Research Center and the Harvard Well-Being and Work Initiative, the quality of workplace relationships has been associated with how happy, healthy, and productive we are in our jobs and how likely we are to stick around.

Given the importance of social relationships, keep these things in mind when considering a prospective workplace.

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STYLES:** Find out whether the company's leaders are supportive, approachable, and transparent. Leadership that values open communication and employee well-being tends to foster better workplace relationships.

**TEAMWORK:** Determine if the company emphasizes teamwork, collaboration, and mentoring. A collaborative environment usually indicates strong, positive relationships among employees.

**FEEDBACK AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:** Consider the human resources practices related to performance management and if positions' descriptions and performance expectations are clear. Find out if communication and feedback are timely, consistent, and fair, and if the employer commits resources to foster employee growth and development.

**EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION:** See if the organization has programs for recognizing and rewarding employee performance and achievements. This kind of recognition strengthens workplace relationships.

**SHARED GOVERNANCE:** How are decisions and plans made in the company? When this work is collaborative, employees tend to feel more connected with each other.

**EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS):** Look for a list of ERGs that might align with similar interests, backgrounds, or goals and could be a source of support in the workplace.

**WORK/LIFE BALANCE:** Research the company's work flexibility and services. Flexible work schedules or remote work options can obviously be a plus. Other support services, training and development opportunities, and talent management programs are also factors that can enhance workplace relationships and satisfaction.

Those of us who are building careers spend lots of time at work. What better way to ensure a sense of well-being than to seek out employers who make social connection a priority.



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