



# Creating meaningful connections @ work



happimatters

# So glad you are here

If you want to know why we need to be more intentional about how we connect with one another at work and why this is so important, especially now... you have come to the right place.

This powerful little e-book is packed with valuable information and tools to help your workplace become a more connected and happier one.

# In 10 short pages you will learn:

1

Why connection matters

2

Why we need to make a conscious effort to bring more connection to work

3

Why it can be difficult for us to connect on a more meaningful level

4

How you can bring more connection to your workplace, your team and your colleagues

More importantly, this little guide can also serve as a conversation starter for your team so that you can bring more connection into your workplace in a way that works for you.

It all starts with a conversation. Sometimes the smallest changes can have the biggest impact.

We are made to connect!



# 1 Why connection matters

Connection is crucial to our physical, emotional and psychological health and we need it now more than ever. It's like a superpower that protects our health and makes us happier. The best part? It also encourages more compassion and empathy with one another.

We are wired to connect and, when we do, we feel good. So much so that we actually feel 'social pleasure' from belonging and connection.

Social Psychologist Mathew Lieberman, author of *Social – Why Our Brains Are Wired To Connect* and the person who coined the term 'social pleasure', claims that eating delicious food, looking at attractive people, winning money, being liked, loved, and feeling understood all light up the same part of the brain. In other words, our brain rewards us when we connect.

Lieberman goes on to say that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is incorrect and argues that social connection is the foundation from which all other needs are built upon.

Most recently, loneliness has become a global public health concern. Loneliness increases your risk of heart disease by 30% and is more of a threat to your health than smoking.

In Australia last year, R U OK?, APS (Australian Psychological Society) & Ending Loneliness Together called on the Federal Government to prioritise a national strategy to address loneliness in Australia. In the submission, they stated that:

"Loneliness has a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing, productivity, and functioning in daily life. One in four Australians aged 12 to 89 experience problematic levels of loneliness. At any given time, the estimated prevalence of problematic levels of loneliness is around 5 million".

**"Connection and the quality of our relationships is THE biggest predictor of long term happiness."**

Shawn Achor – *The Happiness Advantage*

## 2 Why we need to make a conscious effort to bring more connection to work

**The lonelier we are, the less empathy we tend to feel for others, the more likely we are to take offense, the more defensive we act and the more likely we are to hurt others by pushing them away.**

A recent study by Enboarder surveyed 2,000 full-time employees from the U.S., UK and Australia. It found that 69% of people do not feel a very strong sense of connection to their co-workers. Almost two-thirds (62%) of employees have used "burnt out" to describe work in the last year (more so for hybrid workers). They agree that collaborating with and connecting to others has become more difficult. Everyday interactions strengthen employees' sense of connection to each other and to their overall team, helping them stay motivated and bring their best selves to work.

Simply put, employees who feel a sense of connection to people they work with are more motivated and do better work.

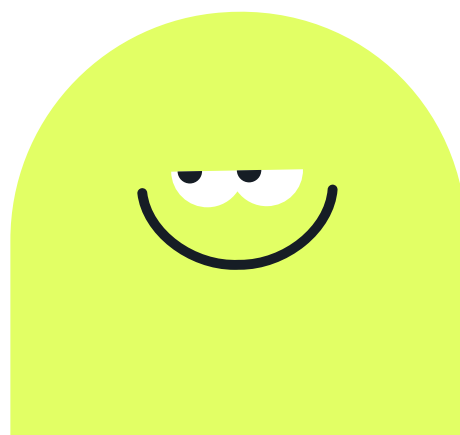
Gallup, one of the most reputable companies for providing organisational analytics, has been reporting the importance of 'having a best friend at work' for nearly 20 years.

As Shasta Nelson says in her book *The Business of Friendship*, "there is not 1 single study that shows we perform better or are happier without friends at work; and yet twenty years later, too many of us still pause, shake our heads a bit and grimace when the subject comes up. It's like we don't really believe all the studies that show that liking whom we work with is one of the most significant predictors for our engagement, retention, inventory control, safety and productivity. "

Nelson goes on to say that having good relationships at work protects our bodies from stress, reduces disease, strengthens immune function, decreases worry and increases resiliency. All from having a friend or two at work!

**"37% of Australians feel lonely at work. 40% feel lonely at work in the US."**

Noreena Hertz - *The Lonely Century*



# 3 Why it can be difficult for us to connect on a more meaningful level

Communication is merely an exchange of information, but connection is an exchange of our humanity.

Even though we are wired for connection and belonging, there are many invisible blocks that can prevent us from connecting with others. In an article I wrote for Tiny Buddha, I listed 5 reasons we may shy away from deeper connections.

1

## We Make Emotions Binary

Emotions are not 'good' or 'bad' they are simply data, giving us signs and clues. We have not been taught to be with and embrace all of our emotions, so we judge and suppress many of them. We are comfortable around someone who is happy but feel very uncomfortable if someone is sad.

2

## We Hide Our Vulnerability

When we experience uncomfortable emotions like sadness, guilt, shame or fear it can be scary and vulnerable to share these emotions with someone. Naturally, we want to protect ourselves from this type of exposure. Yet sharing these deep parts of ourselves with someone we trust can provide us with a deep sense of connection, acceptance and belonging (not to mention a cascade of feel-good brain chemicals).

3

## Risk of Being Ousted

Belonging to a group is hardwired into our brains, so if we experience social exclusion, it actually registers in the brain as physical pain (sad but true story). This often means that people forgo their own needs, not take risks such as expressing opinions if it means we get to be accepted in a group. I think we have all seen plenty of this play out at work.

4

## Getting Triggered

Any conversation that goes below the depths of surface level chit chat always runs the risk of an emotion making a guest appearance at some stage. With heightened emotions comes the gamble of getting triggered and moving into a threat response. This can be distressing and traumatic for some people. It is in this space we often see old patterns, defence mechanisms, childhood conditioning and other unconscious behaviours playing out

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5

## How Our Emotions Were Met as Children

When we were growing up, if any of our strong emotions like fear, sadness or anger were met with negative consequences in childhood, we may have learned to shut down that part of ourselves. The narrative then became 'it is not safe to show how I really feel'. This coping mechanism can make it difficult to connect with anyone on a deep level as an adult.

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6

## Workplace Norms

For as long as we can remember, we have been conditioned to keep work very separate from our personal lives.. Thanks to Covid, this has started to change and we are beginning to embrace the blending of our personal and work lives and share more of who we really are.

Even though this list may act as encouragement to keep our emotions and vulnerability to a minimum, doing so would not allow us to feel the full, beautiful & rich experience of being human.

## 4 How you can bring more connection to your workplace, your team and your colleagues

**I believe that every team and every organisation has its own special personality. So when we are trying to build more connection into our work and workplaces there is no one size fits all.**

Every culture is different. But if you were to start at the very beginning. Begin by having a conversation, set an intention, create a vision and be consistent.

### **Intention**

Set the intention to create more connection with your team. Find your reasons for wanting to do this... your 'why'. Get some buy-in. Send out a survey, an email, or create a meeting to let people know how important connection is. You can then ask them if they would like to be part of creating a better workplace by finding ways to increase authentic connection with each other.

### **Vision**

What would creating more connection look like for our team? Is connection just something we want to do socially maybe once a week? Or maybe you would like to adopt a couple of connection rituals and slowly begin to build upon, , integrating them into everything you do? Brainstorm ways you can increase connection together as a team. Ask individually, what would help you feel more connected (and safe) at work?

### **Consistency**

How can we make connection a regular part of our workplace culture?

Is it something we organise together, take turns doing, or do we have designated connection cultivators in our team to organise our events?

**“Even remotely, the teams that are doing consistently well are doing so because they have scheduled frequent and regular interactions that leave them closer together.”**

Shasta Nelson – The Business of Friendship



# Yay!

Now that you have decided that you want to increase connection at work here are 13 ideas to get you started:



# 13 Ideas for Connection

1 /

## Release oxytocin

This is the feel-good neurochemical and connection builder. How can you create this? Encourage high fives, fist bumps, hand shakes, hugs and eye contact. If you cannot physically high-five someone or shake their hand, even saying "I wish I could high-five you right now" can release oxytocin.

2 /

## Appreciate & recognise each other

We all want to know that we matter. Recognise a job well done but also make time to appreciate and value others for just being who they are. You can use specific software, a dedicated Slack channel or a quick online meeting.

3 /

## Appreciate yourself in front of peers

Share with each other what we pat ourselves on the back for, something we did that no one else saw or realised that we did.

4 /

## Meeting Check-ins

It can be as simple as give me a number between 1-10 with how you are feeling today or give me one highlight and one lowlight for you right now.

5 /

## Coffee Roulette

Have an online or face to face coffee with a different team member each fortnight/weekly/monthly. I recommend [www.coffee-roulette.com](http://www.coffee-roulette.com).

6 /

## Once a week gratitude

Sharing something great that is happening at work or something you are really grateful for. This can be done by email, at the start of a meeting or shared as part of your regular coffee roulette meeting.

7 /

## Lunch & learn

Over lunch or a quick meeting where an employee shares a skill or interest they love and that everyone gets to learn more about.

# 13 Ideas for Connection continued

8 /

## My user manual

An instruction booklet (a living document) that each employee creates, sharing more about who they are and how they like to work. (Atlassian has great templates).

9 /

## Team cookbook

Create a cookbook with all the teams' favourite recipes, with explanations on why this recipe is important to them.

10 /

## Monthly team building activities

Each employee (or a team) takes it in turns picking the team-building idea for the month. Anything from online cooking classes to inhouse team-building games.

11 /

## Help a charity as a team together

Spend a day working together on a service project. Serving together is powerful because participants experience what psychologists call the 'helpers high' which feels good and facilitates connection.

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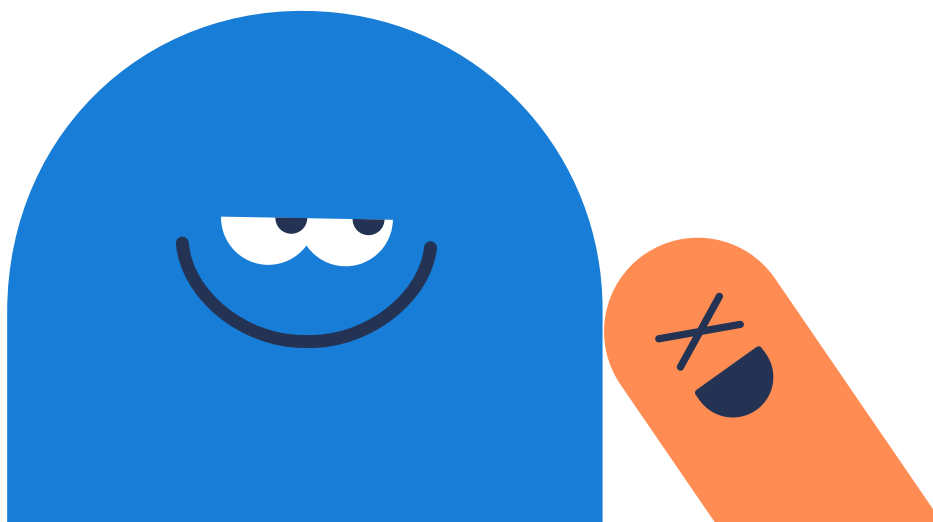
## Have a safe word

This is just one word (or even an emoji) that we can use to let others know we are not okay and may need a bit more support or someone to check in with us.

13 /

## Intentional Listening Day

One of the ways we feel heard, seen and connected is when someone gifts us their full attention. Imagine if we were fully present with everyone when they spoke. That includes online conversations too. Create an initiative just around this one transformative action.



Thank you for  
making our world  
better by helping  
humans to be  
happier at work.

We all matter.

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