



# TGIF!

Thank Goodness It's Friday :)

## SCARE



## CARE



## MY SUPERVISOR OR SOMEONE AT WORK CARES ABOUT ME AS A PERSON

Organisational experts define “caring” in the workplace as “setting each person up for success”. Each individual may interpret this theme differently but at the heart of the matter is the role of **social capital** in the workplace. Authors Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak explain that social capital makes an organisation more than a collection of individuals intent on achieving their own private purposes. Instead, it is about building bridges between people, and some indicators include high levels of trust, robust personal networks and vibrant communities, shared understandings and sense of equitable participation in a joint enterprise. This ‘connection’ supports collaboration, commitment, and ready access to knowledge and talent, i.e. a sharing and team-based approach. Indeed, these benefits of social capital won’t happen unless each staff feels that someone takes a personal interest in them. At the end of the day, **relationships are the glue that holds a great organisation together.**<sup>1</sup>



Jasmine (front row, 2nd from left) appreciates that her AG head and colleagues care about helping her to succeed in her goals

It wasn't long ago that the CTL was established as a new AG in NIE. One of the pioneer staff was Asst Prof Jasmine Sim. Looking back, she is grateful for the understanding and support of the AG Head, A/P Christine Lee, who not only had to ensure that the new AG got up and running but also had to tend to the morale and well-being of the new team. Four years on, Jasmine feels she really belongs, mainly because she has been given the space and opportunities to succeed in both teaching and research. Staff can negotiate courses they want to teach based on the best fit and on students' and course evaluations. For research, areas of collaboration are identified based on individual research interests. Jasmine added, “I am very fortunate to be working in a collegial environment, where the support and spirit of sharing is strong. My colleagues are committed to the success of the AG, and they enjoy their work.”

Another CTL staffer, Ms Low Lian Tin shared, “To me, caring for staff means acknowledging the individual's strengths and attributes which are employed in accomplishing a job well done.” Related to this is having mutual respect and trust for colleagues in the workplace. She shared that her supervisor, A/P Lee, has given her the space to independently manage her roles and responsibilities in supporting CTL academic staff and the MEd programmes. The feeling that her boss cares about her success is also validated by the many opportunities for professional development. She also sees receiving constructive feedback on her performance as an act of caring as it helps her understand her shortcomings and spurs her to improve. Lian Tin feels lucky to be part of a cohesive crew where colleagues truly care about each other. It's not unusual for someone to express concern when she replies to emails late at night or ask after her well-being. She expressed it simply, “It's heart-warming to know that they are concerned about me as a person.”



Lian Tin from CTL

A/P Lee's leadership style as an AG Head is driven by a strong belief that it is important to treat staff as a "whole person" with needs that extend beyond the workplace to the home. She has seen how showing care and concern at work for the whole person translates into

happier, more productive individuals. This care and concern for the whole person starts even before a member joins the AG team. For example, she facilitates the adjustment of foreign faculty as well as members of their families to Singapore by helping them with information for accommodation, possible employment for spouses and schooling for children. Spouses of faculty are often invited to AG social events. CTL makes an effort to also meet new faculty at the airport and bring them to NEC. Christine is pleased that there is a strong culture of collaboration among colleagues in the AG. They share teaching resources with each other. There is a lot of team-teaching as well as collaborative research providing opportunities for junior/new faculty to learn from senior and more experienced faculty. She believes in developing an atmosphere of care and trust and encourages faculty not to compete with each other but to push themselves to reach their own potential as teachers and researchers.

*In the workplace setting, caring for staff means putting them on the path to success.*

At PLS AG, A/P Charlene Tan opined that “having a caring environment in the workplace is a basic ingredient for success”. There is no disputing that people perform better when they are in a supportive environment where there is mutual trust and respect. Charlene's colleague, Ast/Prof Jude Chua can certainly attest to that. Jude has acknowledged his AG Head, A/P Lee Ong Kim to be a pillar of support. In caring about his success, his Head has been frank about his strengths and weaknesses, guiding him in a way that helps him to maximise his potential and talents. Charlene shared that she had also received a lot of support from A/P Lee to pursue the areas of research that she was interested in so that she could contribute better to NIE. She explained, “He was very gracious in granting me a sabbatical and no-pay leave. The result was that I was able to get a book published. It means a lot to be given this sort of help and consideration in pursuing my research because I know he had to deal with the disruption to our AG's teaching workload”. Charlene also feels blessed to be part of a culture that demonstrates care, trust and collegiality. She recounted many occasions where informal sharing amongst her colleagues sparked her ideas which improved her teaching. In the end, it's usually the little things, such as colleagues offering to give a lift home and buying drinks for one another, that stand out and count the most.

<sup>1</sup>Wagner, R. and Harter, J. (2006) 12: The Elements of Great Managing. New Jersey. Gallup