



I HAVE A BEST FRIEND AT WORK

Organisational research indicates that workplaces in which employees report having a “best friend” amongst their colleagues are more efficient and harmonious. This is because group contributions are enhanced by the quality of relationships between employees at work, in turn nurturing trust and loyalty. Research on staff in various settings has shown that “friends” are more likely to invite and share candid information, suggestions, and opinions and to accept them without feeling threatened. Friends tolerate disagreements better than those who are not friends. The good feeling that friends share make them more likely to cheer each other on. Friends are more committed to the goals of the group and work harder, regardless of the type of task.¹

It is true that people would rather build bridges than construct walls around themselves. When a culture of caring and kindness exists in the workplace, all the more that camaraderie and collegiality will develop amongst colleagues. According to Glasser's Choice Theory, there are seven caring habits that govern relationships, and this could apply to the workplace as well: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences.² To have these elements present in the working environment makes for a cohesive and engaged workforce.

It is true that people would rather build bridges than construct walls around themselves. When a culture of caring and kindness exists in the workplace, all the more that camaraderie and collegiality will develop amongst colleagues.

Cecilia Wong, Assistant Head from Office of Teacher Education (OTE) has been with NIE for almost nine years. While a number of colleagues whom she has built close working relationships with have come and left over the years, she counts six people as her “best friends” at NIE – Stephane Cheung, Raminah Bte Silap and Abby Lim from OTE, Imelda Sng from DED, Low Peck San from FIN and Loh Wai Mun from OAQM. Asked what sets these people apart, she shared that she can confide in them on both work and personal matters. She also considers her colleagues in the Programme Administration unit of OTE as her close friends. She explained, “When you think about it, we spend more time at work than we do at home. It makes a difference having your colleagues as friends because it makes working life much more enjoyable.” One of the things Cecilia appreciates most about her friends is being able to bounce ideas off them to get a different perspective without fear of being criticized or ridiculed. She added, “Having different views from time to time does not matter as long as everyone is willing to listen and respect each other's opinion.”

Cecilia (front, left) with her friends from OTE and OAQM



Another OTE staffer, Mr Eric Yeo explained that while he does not have a specific “best friend”, his friendships with people within and beyond OTE are strong enough to enable him to confide in them when the need arises. Eric maintains, “Having an open and friendly culture which fosters camaraderie is important because it makes it easy to work with one another, strive through the tough times together, and even talk about things beyond work”. He added, “Acknowledging that differences at work surface from time to time, strong camaraderie helps mitigate any ill feelings that may otherwise occur”.

Eric has also observed that OTE's open and friendly culture has made it easier for new staff to settle in quickly and find their place in the team. Mrs Koh Sou Keaw, Head of OTE Administration shared that new staff members are guided by their more experienced peers or supervisors, so that they feel supported and encouraged to quickly gain confidence. Formal and informal meetings have been established to discuss issues faced at work. For example, the monthly operational meeting of assistant heads helps keep each unit informed of current and upcoming events. This is also a platform that taps on the wisdom of the team to solve problems together. Moreover, MCSOs from different units in OTE form a TE WorkLife committee to organise recreational activities to foster team-bonding. A retreat is organised annually for all OTE members with the aim of strengthening the connections as one family.

7 Habits that Foster a Friendlier, Happier Work Environment

- Supporting
- Encouraging
- Listening
- Accepting
- Trusting
- Respecting
- Negotiating differences

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

² in Williams, T. (2011) HR Summit 2011: Creating a Workplace of Choice. Singapore