



Stronger Friendship Bonds, Longer Workplace Tenure: 51% of Hiring Managers and 76% of Job Seekers Agree

How Connections Improve Morale and Productivity

OKLAHOMA CITY, Feb. 26, 2025 — Over the past few months, many major companies have instituted a return-to-work policy for their employees, with some citing the change as a way to foster a stronger culture and a more productive workforce. However, according to a recent Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey, workplace friendships may be the accelerator for these elements.

Nearly all U.S. hiring managers (97%) feel there are benefits to employees forming friendships in the workplace, including:

- Improving employee and company productivity (67%)
- Increasing employee morale (55%)
- Strengthening company culture (51%)
- Improving employee mental health (50%)
- Reducing turnover (44%)
- Reducing employee burnout (40%)

Friendships may help retain current employees, as 89% say employees are more likely to stay with a company if they have friendships in the workplace, with 42% strongly agreeing with this statement.

Encouraging Friendships in the Workplace

Companies appear overwhelmingly confident in their employees' ability to form friendships in the workplace, with a strong majority (85%) believing it is easy for employees to do so. More than a third report it is very easy (34%). This perception may be attributed to the number and variety of ways companies encourage employees to establish these relationships. Nearly 9 in 10 companies (87%) use methods to encourage/help employees form friendships, most commonly



through:

- Lunch events (46%)
- Encouraging meetings among peers/those at the same job level (43%)
- Hosting company retreats/get-togethers (40%)
- Mentorship programs (32%)
- Happy hours (29%)
- Group volunteer days (28%)

Interactions Outside the Workplace

Outside of the workplace, more than 95% of hiring managers believe employees at their company interact in a variety of ways, including:

- Texting/phone calls (76%)
- In-person get-togethers (59%)
- Social media interactions (53%)
- Attending events for one another (45%)

Sixty-nine percent report their company actively encourages such employee interactions outside of work. Creating a welcoming and communicative workplace may encourage friendships, and this appears to be the case for many. However, there seems to be a fine line, as 70% feel workplace interactions should be kept strictly professional.

Shifts in Employee Demeanor

Interestingly, companies have taken note of a shift in employees' demeanor over the past few years. Forty-two percent say employees today are more extrinsically motivated (i.e., motivated to perform well for a raise, promotion or bonus) than three years ago. Nearly a quarter report employees are more confrontational (24%) and less excited about connecting with colleagues in person (24%).

Friendships in the Workplace Benefit Job Seekers and Companies

Most employed U.S. job seekers' companies encourage friendships in the workplace, and many report the methods their companies use to encourage friendships are effective. Even though most job seekers agree that workplace interactions should be kept strictly professional, that does not necessarily mean "no" to friendships. A majority report that there are specific benefits to friendships in the workplace for themselves and their company.

Perception and Benefits of Companies Fostering Workplace Friendships

Job seekers report leaning toward being professional at work but also believe there are benefits to being friends with coworkers. Specifically, many job seekers believe there is a wide range of specific benefits they experience when they form friendships in the workplace:

- Improved mental health (47%)
- Improved productivity (46%)

- Increased desire to stay with the company long-term (45%)
- Increased morale toward the company (41%)
- Reduced burnout (39%)
- Decreased desire to quit/leave the company (34%)
- Reduced interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (33%)
- Improved opinion of company culture (33%)
- Improved opinion of the company, in general (29%)

The Value of Friendships for Job Seekers

The benefits and value of friendships in the workplace for job seekers manifest in other ways. More than half of employed or unemployed job seekers who have ever been employed (59%) report they could not get through a workday without the friendship(s) they've formed at work. About half of all job seekers (49%) are worried about being able to create a friendship(s) at their next company.

Employed or unemployed Gen Z job seekers are more likely than their millennial, Gen X and boomer/senior counterparts to agree they could not get through a workday without the friendship(s) they've formed at work (71% vs 57%, 56% and 50%, respectively). Gen Z job seekers are also more likely to be worried about being able to form a friendship(s) at their next company (67% vs 48%, 43% and 25%, respectively).

Friendships and Employee Retention

Friendships in the workplace can also benefit the company by keeping job seekers there longer. More than three-quarters of job seekers (76%) would be more likely to stay with a company if they have friendships in the workplace.

Among job seekers who have ever been employed, nearly two-thirds (65%) have stayed at a job longer than they intended because of their friendship(s) at a job. Thirty-six percent left a job they liked because they could not form friendship(s) at work.

Employed or unemployed Gen Z job seekers who have ever been employed are more likely than their millennial, Gen X and boomer/senior counterparts to have left a job they liked because they were not able to form friendship(s) at work (49% vs. 36%, 32%, and 23%, respectively).

Compared to three years ago, 31% of job seekers report employees today are less excited about connecting with colleagues in-person. Companies need to explore practical ways that work for their employees or risk losing out on the benefits of workplace friendships among job seekers.

Companies Fostering Workplace Friendships

Many job seekers report their company allows or even fosters space for friendships in the workplace in different ways. Sixty-nine percent say company culture welcomes employees sharing details of their personal lives during work hours if they are comfortable doing so.

Fifty-seven percent report that their company actively encourages employees to interact with one another outside of work. Further, about 7 in 10 (71%) employed job seekers indicate that the methods their company uses to encourage/help employees to form friendships in the workplace are effective.

Overall, job seekers are open to different methods for companies to encourage/help build friendships in the workplace. Among all job seekers, almost 9 in 10 (87%) report specific methods that have or would encourage/help them make friendships in the workplace. Specifically, the most popular methods include:

- Lunch events (42%)
- Encouraging meetings among peers/those of the same job level (42%)
- Hosting happy hours (32%)
- Hosting company retreats/get-togethers (31%)
- Affinity/social groups (28%)
- Encouraging group volunteer days (27%)
- Mentorship programs (25%)

Personal Experience and Actions

While about half of job seekers report they try not to engage with anyone that they work with outside of work (47%) and do not feel the need to be friends with those they work with (53%), the majority (76%) believe it's easy for them to form friendships in the workplace. This ease of forming friendships is bolstered by the extent job seekers have interacted with colleagues outside of work, with texting (66%), getting together in-person (54%) or phone calls (53%) being the most common.

"In today's dynamic work environment, fostering genuine friendships among employees is not just a nice-to-have, but a strategic imperative," said Bill Stoller, Express Employment International CEO. "These connections enhance morale, boost productivity and significantly improve retention rates. By creating a culture where friendships can flourish, companies are investing in their most valuable asset: their people."

Survey Methodology

The Job Insights survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals Nov. 11 – 26, 2024, among 1,001 U.S. hiring decision-makers.

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 21 to Dec. 10, 2024, among 1,039 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodologies, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment International. Founded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing franchisor supports the Express Employment Professionals franchise and related brands. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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