



Workplace Friendships Improve Employee Retention

Improved Productivity and Employee Morale Also Benefits of Making Friends at Work

TORONTO, Feb. 26, 2025 — Canadian companies have spent significant time and money on the problem of employee retention, but one strategy they should not overlook is fostering workplace friendships, according to a newly released recent Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.

Almost all companies (94%) say there are several benefits to employees forming friendships in the workplace. More than three-quarters (85%) believe employees are more likely to stay with a company if they have friends in the workplace, with more than one-third (35%) strongly agreeing.

Other benefits include:

- Improving employee and company productivity (65%)
- Increasing employee morale (54%)
- Improving employee mental health (50%)
- Strengthening company culture (47%)
- Reducing turnover (41%)
- Reducing interpersonal conflicts (40%)

Encouraging Friendships in the Workplace

Companies appear overwhelmingly confident in their employees' ability to form friendships in the workplace, with a strong majority (77%) believing it is easy for employees to do so and a third (30%) saying it is very easy. More than three-quarters of companies (82%) say they actively encourage employees to develop friendships in a variety of ways:

- Lunch events (46%)
- Encouraging meetings among peers/those at the same job level (34%)
- Hosting company retreats/get-togethers (32%)
- Mentorship programs (30%)
- Happy hours (27%)



Interactions Outside the Workplace

Almost all companies (95%) believe their employees also interact outside of work, in a variety of ways, including:

- Texting/phone calls (72%)
- Social media interactions (55%)
- In-person get-togethers (52%)
- Attending events for one another (37%)

Two-thirds of companies report their company culture welcomes employees sharing details of their personal life, but there seems to be a fine line, as 66% of companies feel workplace interactions should be kept strictly professional.

Job Seekers Value Workplace Friendships

Job seekers agree that workplace friendships are important and a key part of employee retention. More than three-quarters of job seekers (78%) say they would be more likely to stay with a company if they have friendships in the workplace. Around two-thirds (64%) have stayed at a job longer than intended because of their friendships at work while one-third (32%) have left a job because they were not able to form friendships at work.

In fact, more than half of job seekers (55%) report they could not get through a workday without the friendships they've formed, and half (49%) are worried about being able to form friendships at their next company.

While two-thirds of job seekers (64%) agree that workplace interactions should be kept strictly professional, they point to several benefits they experience by forming friendships in the workplace, including:

- Improved mental health (50%)
- Improved productivity (49%)
- Reduced interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (47%)
- Increased desire to stay with the company long-term (45%)
- Increased morale towards the company (43%)
- Decreased desire to quit/leave the company (39%)
- Reduced burnout (36%)
- Improved opinion of the company, in general (31%)
- Improved opinion of company culture (31%)

Generational Differences

Gen Z job seekers are more likely than their counterparts to value workplace friendships. This is important for companies looking at strategies to retain their newer employees.

Gen Z job seekers are more likely to say they've stayed at a job longer than intended due to a workplace friendship (75% compared to 65% for millennials, 61% for Gen X, and 50% for boomers). They are also more likely to say they could not get through the workday without

friends at work (63% compared to 59% for millennials, 51% for Gen X and 37% for boomers).

Younger workers are also more likely to be worried about being able to form friendships at work (59% compared to 52% for millennials, 46% for Gen X and 33% for boomers). In fact, Gen Z job seekers are the most likely to have left a job they liked because they were not able to form friendships at work (42% compared to 39% for millennials, 19% for Gen X and 15% for boomers).

Companies Fostering Workplace Friendships

Many job seekers report their company allows or even fosters space for friendships in the workplace in different ways. Two-thirds (67%) say their company culture welcomes employees sharing details of their personal lives during work hours, while half (50%) report their company actively encourages employees to interact with one another outside of work. The majority of job seekers (60%) say that the methods their company uses to encourage employees to form friendships in the workplace are effective.

Job seekers are open to different methods for companies to encourage friendship building in the workplace. Job seekers list various methods that have or would encourage them to make friendships in the workplace, including:

- Lunch events (42%)
- Encouraging meetings among peers/those of the same job level (40%)
- Hosting happy hours (29%)
- Hosting company retreats/get-togethers (28%)
- Affinity/social groups (28%)
- Mentorship programs (27%)
- Encouraging group volunteer days (24%)

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 (49%) and do not feel the need to be friends with those they work with (54%), the majority (73%) believe it's easy for them to form friendships in the workplace. In fact, there are several ways job seekers have interacted with colleagues outside of work, including texting (57%), getting together in-person (51%), phone calls (43%), or attending events for one another (36%) being the most common.

Post-Pandemic Shift in Workplace Interactions

The survey also found an interesting shift in workplace friendships and employee behaviour in the post-pandemic years. More than one-third (34%) of companies say employees today are more extrinsically motivated (i.e., motivated to perform well for a raise, promotion, or bonus) than three years ago. In addition, almost one-quarter (24%) say employees are less excited about connecting with colleagues in person and have become more confrontational (21%).

Compared to three years ago, more than 1 in 3 job seekers (34%) 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 that come with the development of workplace friendships.

"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 Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between Nov. 11 – 26, 2024, among 505 Canadian hiring decision-makers

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 21 to Dec. 6, 2024, among 505 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodology, please contact Ana Curic at Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

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.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, employing 427,000 people globally in 2024 and more than 11 million since its inception. For more information, visit ExpressPros.ca.