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GOOD RELATIONSHIPS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

BY BRIAN GAREAU

More than eighty years ago, Harvard began what has been called “the most comprehensive longitudinal study on adult development.” And, amazingly, the study continues today. Its overall conclusion is simple and yet challenging to achieve: “Good relationships keep us happier and healthier.”



The study makes three major points:

1. Social connections are really good for our health and well-being.
2. It's the quality, not the quantity, of our close relationships that matters most.
3. Good relationships protect both our bodies and our brains.

Perhaps that's why:

- Gallup poses the question of whether “I have a best friend at work” in its Q12 Employee Engagement Survey.
- A ten-year research study showed that “as much as 35% of the variability in discretionary performance of employees is a result of their manager's style and behavior.”
- A Fortune 100 company found that employees who felt their boss showed “genuine interest and concern for their well-being” had engagement levels 30+ percentage points higher than their counterparts.
- Research has found that our brains work better when we feel positive. So, important things in business such as creativity, decision-making abilities, and fewer errors (by staying more focused) are affected by our feelings.
- People stay where they are happy and have higher levels of attendance.



Which leads me to a practical question: What can businesses proactively do to promote professional, quality relations in the workplace? I'm suggesting things well beyond the traditional boilerplate statements many organizations make about harassment, diversity and inclusion.

Below is a quick Internal Quality Relations (IQR) Assessment I use with clients. Please score each question with either a 3 (very consistent); a 2 (inconsistent); or a 1 (very inconsistent). In our organization, internal quality relations (IQRs) are critical to our success, so we:

- Highlight these desired behaviors by living our values.
- Review our spans of control (supervisor-to-employee ratios) to allow time to build quality relations.
- Clarify specific expectations for both leaders and employees.
- Hold everyone accountable for building and maintaining internal quality relations.
- Proactively address destructive relations in the workplace.
- Monitor key internal relations using different assessment tools. Teach everyone effective ways
- Include their importance in our orientation and onboarding.
- Teach everyone effective ways to handle differences of opinion and resolve disagreements.
- Conduct ongoing cross-functional teams to minimize silo thinking and limited relations.
- Hold networking activities so employees can easily connect with others outside their workgroup.
- Select people (new hires and internal promotions) who exhibit strong relationship-building skills and get results.
- Factor relationship-building behaviors into recognition and reward activities.



Next Steps. For items above that you rated 3, how do you leverage those behaviors? For items you rated 2 or 1, start by picking one item to proactively address over the next 30 days, an item that would significantly impact relationships in your workplace.

When relationships are nonexistent, unsure, tense, or broken, many employees will react with unproductive behaviors:

- Closing off real dialog
- Overreacting to feedback
- Second-guessing decisions
- Resisting change
- Overstepping boundaries
- Manipulating information and situations
- Blaming others

It's impossible to keep 100 percent of employees happy all the time, but enabling sincere, honest, trusting relationships can make a huge competitive difference. Let's remember that the opposite of "relationship" is division, dispute, dissension, disengagement, and even divorce (leaving). And, in life and work, rules without relationships equals resistance. Can your organization afford the waste of time, money, and human capability created by poor internal relations? Good relationships don't just happen. Isn't it time to be proactive and address them?



Brian Gareau has been studying, consulting, and implementing employee engagement initiatives for more than 15 years. He helped lead a successful eight-year employee engagement initiative at a Fortune 50 corporation and has written several books on the subject. More information is available at BrianGareauInc.com, or contact him directly at Brian@BrianGareauInc.com.

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