



# FROM THE BASKETBALL COURT TO THE BOARD ROOM: BENEFITS OF FRIENDSHIP AT WORK

I'm not really into basketball. And yet...over the last month or so I have paid a lot of attention to basketball. As Caitlin Clark took down records, one by one, I started clicking on articles, which led to more articles about the NCAA, WBNA, and also the NBA. And then I noticed all the stories about how well the Knicks were doing and another story caught my attention – the history of teammates Jalen Brunson, Josh Hart, and Donte DiVincenzo.

I learned that these three Knicks teammates were also teammates at Villanova, where they won a championship together. It's been theorized that part of what is making the Knicks work right now is the dynamic between these three and even how that dynamic spreads out to the rest of the team. Those who study workplace dynamics have found several benefits that come from having friendships among colleagues that could be at play for the Knicks. These benefits are not just related to employee happiness, satisfaction, and morale (though those are a positive too.) Rather, there's a benefit to the organization as a whole.

As Jon Clifton, the chief executive of Gallup and a researcher on workplace dynamics said, "People who are close, their communication happens faster. It's almost like they develop their own languages. They have shortcuts to say complex things in just a few amount of words. But they've also built trust." Research has shown that employee groups with friends had less internal conflict and "intuitively organized themselves" in a way that made the process smoother and more efficient. The trust in workplace friendships can yield a benefit in creativity, brainstorming, accountability, and open and honest debate. These benefits are true whether the workplace is a basketball court, a corporation, or a non-profit organization.

If your employees didn't all happen to come from the same university team or other friendship-forming background, what can an employer do to support the growth of friendships at work? Here are a few ideas:

- Set aside time for employees to interact on a more personal level, such as over lunch or before a meeting.
- Encourage employees to see each other as resources (rather than competition) and to help each other. This creates the basis of trust from which a deeper relationship can develop.
- Design some low-stakes deliverables that are done in partnership.
- Promote open communication – both up and down the hierarchy of the organization and through a technical system that makes it easy to share information and thoughts.
- Create spaces for relaxed gatherings to happen, such as establishing common areas with a draw (like a coffee maker or snacks), a monthly team lunch, or virtual chat platforms.

**If you'd like help fostering a culture of positive relationships among employees at your organization, contact Tami.**



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