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People Make The Difference whitepaper

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What I've learnt: friendships in the workplace.

A huge amount of our time every week is spent at work, so forming relationships is not only convenient, it's inevitable. Unfortunately, finding the right balance between professional and personal can be difficult and managers, in particular, need to be aware of the boundaries when it comes to these relationships.

The positives?

- Friendships and a high level of cohesiveness within your team are fantastic things and certainly shouldn't be discouraged. They can help to create a work hard/play hard environment where your team are motivated and inspired every day.
- A close-knit team is more likely to want to socialise outside of work hours, so celebrating your success as a team becomes easier – and fun!
- When all your team members enjoy being around each other they often invest more time in getting to know each other, understanding each other and supporting each other as they work together. This means that they can get the best out of each other and drive the team to success.
- Fostering positive relationships between team members and managers can also lend itself to high levels of loyalty within a team.

The negatives?

- Managers who choose to become good friends with team members often struggle when it comes to having difficult conversations. These confrontations tend to be avoided – never a good sign.

- Other team members are quick to pick up on favouritism, whether it's from the manager or from their fellow team members. Favouritism damages cohesion within a team and can cause employee loyalty to drop.
- Unfortunately, even the best managers aren't good at separating personal and professional relationships and it can quickly turn into a tangled web as you try to avoid hurting feelings whilst getting the job done.
- Friendships often lend themselves to sharing more than you should – unfortunately the things you say, comment upon or joke about can easily be taken out of context and misconstrued, leaving team members feeling hurt and negative about being a part of your team.

How can we strike a balance?

It's extremely important to foster positive relationships within your team and there should always be a close working relationship with a good understanding of each other and mutual respect. Managers, however, should avoid becoming too close.

Socialising and team building should always be encouraged but knowing when to leave is important; never stay too long or drink too much! Always be aware that the things you say are making an impact and can be passed onto other team members.

An easy way to start thinking about the relationships you have with your team is to ask yourself this question:

Are the relationships within the team helping the team to realise their full potential or is the team being compromised because of personal relationships?

The most important thing to do as you try to strike the balance between your personal and professional life is to be in touch with your emotional intelligence. Being part of a team requires you to work closely with others and understand them so that you can get the best out of them but knowing where to draw the line in different situations requires a lot of emotional intelligence.

If you're struggling to find the right balance between personal and professional, People Make The Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peplemakethedifference.com.au.