

Developing Great Relationships with Other People in the Company

By Jennifer Anderson

There is something to be said for enjoying the people you work with, especially if much of your waking hours are spent with the people you interact with at work. Conservatively speaking, you likely spend on average 40 hours a week, which equates to about 2080 hours a year, at work. There are 8760 hours in a year, with sleep and work taking more than 50% of your week; that leaves very little waking hours to be spent with other people in your life.

So, if you do not have great relationships with your team, a big part of your waking hours are not going to be enjoyable. If that idea does not sound desirable to you, read on for suggestions on how to develop great relationships with other people in your company, your department, or your team.

Assess the Status Quo

You need to begin with an assessment of where you are currently at with your workplace relationships. You may have some people you get along with very well, but others you speak to rarely. To truly develop great relationships with other people in the company, start with answering these questions:

- How long have you been with the firm?
- How many people do you interact with frequently?
- Who do you spend the most time with inside the company?
- What is the quality of those interactions?
- Are you struggling to get along with particular team members and why?

Other People

Perhaps there are other people outside your immediate team that you want to get to know better. Do not use the oft said excuse, “I am an introverted engineer,” to avoid those other people. Instead, be thoughtful and purposeful with getting to know people in other teams or departments. People who are successful at companies have a robust internal network; that takes time and effort. To truly develop great relationships with other people in the company, determine what new relationships you would like to forge by answering these questions:

- Are there other people in the company you also want to get to know? How have you approached them in the past?
- Whom do you know in other departments? How can you strengthen those relationships?



- What teams do you currently interact with regularly? Are there other people on those teams whom you do not know very well, but deep down you feel you should know better?

Making the Connections

The fastest way to start getting to know someone is by just walking up and introducing yourself. However, for all you introverted engineers reading this, you probably just had a mild heart-attack thinking about merely walking up and introducing yourself. So, if that direct tactic does not work for you, try instead to utilize your existing network. Who on your team knows people on other teams? Ask them for help with introductions to new people when you are all attending company-wide meetings or do some blended team lunches. Starting the connection process is not hard; what is more difficult is building sustainable relationships with your peers.

Ongoing Relationships

An easy way to think about building relationships is to be honest with how much time you are – or are not – investing in connecting with people. Here is a reasonable equation: 50 work weeks per year x 1 lunch meeting per week = 50 opportunities to deepen current or forge new relationships.

Stop going to lunch each week with the same 5 people and talking about the same things. Instead, go to lunch with that group once a month and, during the 3 other weeks of the month, go to lunch with at least one new person per week. One-on-one lunches are some of the best opportunities to really get to know someone. People open up and talk

more about real things – beyond the weather or a TV show – when there is just one other person. When there are a few people at the lunch outing, the opportunity to deepen relationships with others is limited. If you do not believe that, pay attention to what people talk about in the group settings versus in private one-on-one conversations. If you truly want ongoing, sustained workplace friendships and connections, make the continued effort to invite people to lunch. You all have to eat!

Pay Attention to What is Important to Them

If you want to develop great relationships with other people in the company, pay attention to what is important to them. Are they married? Kids? Hobbies? Travel interests? Food? Sports? What is their alma mater? Where did they grow up? House projects? Even though we spend a lot of waking hours at work, we all have personal discretionary time, so seek to understand how they like to spend that personal time. Understanding their interests will give you great insights to know more about their complete personality. When people feel like you are genuinely interested in them as a whole person, it is easier for them to open up and reciprocate a friendly working relationship. So, during those one-on-one lunches, get to know their life outside of work so that you have more to talk about than the weather.

Ultimately, to truly develop great relationships with other people in the company, you will need to make a concerted effort to get outside your comfort zone. People are usually very kind and responsive when another person reaches out to make an effort to be friendly and forge connections, so be brave enough to introduce yourself. Be brave enough to invite them to lunch and then see how it goes. Do not be surprised if you find yourself with more people to talk to at work, feeling more connected to your team and your firm, and enjoying your work life as a result! ■



Born into a family of engineers but focusing on the people side of engineering, Jen Anderson has over 21 years of helping leaders build stronger careers for themselves and their teams. (www.CareerCoachJen.com)