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There was a time when it was widely believed one should not make friends at work and maintain only a professional relationship with colleagues, right? Today, many working professionals have shattered this myth and proven that friendships at work can be beneficial, both professionally and personally. It has been observed that organisations are fostering friendships at work and facing some very positive repercussions. Narasimha Rao, vice president - HR, AgroTech Foods Ltd opines, "Competition and work pressures have no bearing on friendship at work. Friends are an integral part of our lives and we spend most of our waking lives at work. This scenario leads us to build relationships at our workplace, which over a period of time, with some people, turns into something long-lasting. In fact, having friends at work helps people to look forward to 'going to work'."

Srinivasan Iyer, business coach & CEO, MPower Business Facilitators Ltd, Mumbai expresses, "People spend a lot of time commuting and working together, especially in metros. Work pressure brings people together but competition drifts them away. However, you may work together for years and yet have only a few real friends at work. After all, friendships just happen when two people click instantly."

According to Manisha Amol, vice president marketing, Modicare Ltd, "I think one can have friends in different departments wherein there is no fear of any competition. It is also a good opportunity to interact on general issues and not 'work' all the time. This helps them unwind and release work pressures that is bogging them down all the time."

So, are organisations as supportive when it comes to encouraging friendships between co-workers? Iyer asserts, "The workforce in most organisations today is young. And organisations are slowly beginning to realise that friendships at work can be a great tool for employee retention." Rao further discusses



SINCE WE SPEND MOST OF OUR TIME AT THE WORKPLACE, FOSTERING FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS BECOMES INEVITABLE. **YASMIN TAJ** EVALUATES THE PROS AND CONS OF HAVING FRIENDS AT WORK

how earlier, most organisations looked at friendships at work with scepticism as it was believed to lead to 'groupism', "However, there is a new breed of organisations that are now fostering friendships through several interventions. Appointing 'buddies' to help new recruits to settle down well, etc are a part of these interventions." Today, the line between personal and professional relationships is blurring and in some cases, diminishing. Friendships at work extend beyond working hours under several instances. Such friendships can be highly beneficial but there can be times when certain relationships at

work can reach a vulnerable point. In such a scenario, how should a working professional maintain his/her friendships at work and not let it affect his/her productivity? What stance should an organisation take? Iyer suggests, "Give space to each other and settle all work disagreements before you get out of the office door. Bond, collaborate and have fun but don't insist that your friends always do what you want them to. Respect your friends and their right to disagree with you. Enjoy your work and your friendships."

According to Rao, "While fostering friendships at work is a good idea, professionals need to be mature enough to handle such

relationships tactfully and exercise discretion where needed."

Amol concludes by expressing, "One should choose friends carefully and ensure that the friendship is within limits so that it does not affect one's productivity. Also, a professional code of conduct needs to be maintained and friendships should not act as barriers to organisational ethics."

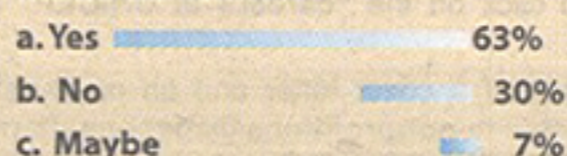
Finally, while it is easy to become friends, it is tricky to remain so. If you already have great friends at work, then you should be glad you share a special bond and always keep a clear demarcation between your personal and professional life. And if you still haven't, then go ahead and break the ice and expand your circle. Just ensure you maintain the balance really well!

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