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## Mingle More in '24

Dear Colleague,

Well, I had one of “those days” again. Up early and eager to get going on my day I packed my lunch, hopped on the train and walked from 30th Street to my office. For a variety of completely reasonable reasons, people taking advantage of the opportunity to work from home (which I like too!), illness etc. I was alone in the office. Campus was cold, the sky overcast. I spent my day talking to faculty and staff from my office via Zoom – again. Sigh. The day took the wind out of my sails. It felt like the energy I had at the start of my day had literally been siphoned off by the Zoom camera. While I appreciate the convenience and flexibility of Zoom, I am not sure that it has made the world a better place for me. I felt sad, lonely even. I miss the face-to-face interaction of pre-pandemic life acutely – and I think others do as well.

The subject line for this reflection came from a department head colleague. I was meeting with a group of department heads and went around the Zoom room asking people to check in with a word or phrase and one said: “I want to mingle more in ‘24.” He too misses his colleagues and as a leader talked about how he sees the need to help his department interact more and be in community with one another. I think he is on to something. Research shows that employees value meaningful relationships at work and further that “a supportive environment can reverse the negative impact of workplace isolation and loneliness on wellbeing.” (D’Oliveira & Persico 2023). A supportive environment is one where colleagues take actions to support others at work. Decades of research point to the importance of relationships to our health while the more recent research on happiness highlights the quality of our day-to-day interactions with those around us as a key in building healthy work environments. The experts are clear to point out that we do not have to be “best friends” with everyone, but that we are better off when we find ways to connect. (Click here to view one of the top ten most watched TED talks of all time, which discusses the link between relationships and happiness.)

My efforts to connect and help others to do so run the gamut from just getting out of my office and walking around at lunch time to actively seeking opportunities to be in the same physical space with colleagues to promoting our workshops and resources. I almost always run into someone I know on my strolls around the quad and often stop to chat. I try to go to every Faculty Social Hour hosted by President Fry and attend campus events including a recent Women's Basketball game where I got to sit with the team! I also do goofy things to let the people I work with know that I care about them like leaving grade school Valentines cards with candy for them.

As we make our way through the winter, I hope that you are finding ways to connect with your colleagues. Carving out time to prioritize connections and relationships such as meeting a colleague for coffee, engaging in an impromptu chat at the office, or introducing yourself to a new colleague at an in-person event can make a big difference.

Warm regards,

Erin

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