

Power Up Performance With Your Peers



“People like me.” “Regular people.” “My peers.” Whatever you call your work colleagues, you pay some degree of attention to what they say and do. We work in an era where trust in “people like me” continues to rise, while trust in business leaders drops, as the 2013 **Edelman Trust Barometer** reported.

How influential are peers in helping you do your job, especially compared to managers and other leaders? Peers matter, according to a recent survey conducted by **Connect Consulting Group**.

Employees value working with their peers because work colleagues offer an easy, fast way to get things done. Employees can learn from people doing the work, jump over the hierarchy and generate practical ideas.

The purpose of the survey was to get a handle on the prevalence of various peer-to-peer practices in organizations and what work environments best support them.

PEER PRESSURE

The peer practices that were included were: peer recognition, thanking peers for being supportive; feedback and giving peers feedback on job performance and training. They also included helping peers learn new skills; coaching; helping peers deal with workplace challenges; idea-sharing; tapping into the wisdom of peers and serving as an ambassador, informing and influencing peers.

The key headlines from the survey were:

- Peer practices are popular, and mostly informal. The most common formal program was peer recognition. Just 32% said their employer offered it.

- Of the 62% who regularly use formal and informal peer practices, 78% said they believe peer practices help them do their job better. They are able to gather quality ideas, information and support from their colleagues quickly in a low-risk setting.

- In the write-in comments about what could be better about peer practices, many respondents requested more structure and support around using peer practices. For instance, respondents said they'd like more encouragement and support, training on how to give feedback and better technology options.

What do people like best about working with their peers?

In their own words, they said:

- “It is the most natural and least threatening way of gaining information, insight and support.”

- “It often helps generate story ideas and story-angle ideas.”

- “Collaboration typically leads to better results.”

- “Promotes collegiality and gets stuff done.”

- “It amplifies learning and better decisions/work output.”

- “There are no parent/child relationships thrust on you and accountability isn't ever about blame or being defensive. It's about staying on track.”

- “Different perspectives and reality checks.”

What are the implications for employers? If organizations pay more attention to

their peer-to-peer practices, they can score a double win—improved performance and increased engagement.

The additional structure that employees are requesting is more about building on and tweaking what exists, rather than converting current peer practices into formal programs.

However, respondents seemed just as satisfied with informal practices as with formal programs.

(Informal practices were defined as “just the way you do things; you and your co-workers are acting on your own.” Formal practices were defined as “employer sponsors a program with a system and policy in place.”)

MORE COLLABORATION

What can PR practitioners, especially those responsible for employee communications do, to help employees collaborate better with peers?

Consider taking these three steps:

1. Helping build a community of peers starts with role modeling peer practices. In the write-in comments, a number of respondents remarked that it wasn't always easy to work with peers in other departments.

The reasons varied, including not knowing individuals, unsure whether they had the permission of their manager or other leaders to contact peers and not feeling they could take the time. Your actions can encourage others to reach out to their peers.

2. Explaining how to share ideas in multiple ways. Survey respondents said they were more comfortable with face-

to-face meetings (91%) and informal meet-ups (74%) than with virtual interactions (65%). Yet, it's not always feasible to get together in person, even for employees who are housed in the same facility.

Also just 28% of the respondents said they were using collaboration technology and social networks on the job.

Yet, these tools—many of which are now easily available through cloud-based subscriptions—are much more robust than email for sharing ideas. By contrast, 73% are using email.

3. Showcasing success stories, including recognizing individuals who use peer practices. By shining a light on peer practices, the individuals who use them and the positive results they get, you can highlight the value of peer practices

This attention can encourage others to experiment, especially in reaching out to others with different skill sets.

The greatest value in collaboration comes when individuals involve others with complementary skills, especially when they work together on new problems or challenges. **PRN**

(Check out the survey highlights at <http://connectconsultinggroup.com/peersurveyresults/>.)

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