

Share the Office Love? New Survey finds 74% of Employees Consider Coworkers Friends and One in Five Believe Their Colleagues Have an Inappropriate Relationship

Fierce, Inc. surveyed over a thousand Individuals to get to the heart of the impact friendship and romance have in the workplace

(SEATTLE) February 13, 2017 – When most of us think of office relationships, we think of romance. While romantic relationships can impact a work environment, research reveals that all types of relationships with coworkers are playing an increasingly significant role in job satisfaction. In a new study released today by leadership development and training experts Fierce, Inc., over a thousand individuals were surveyed to gain insight into the impact of relationships with coworkers.

Coworker or Friend?

While the line between friend and coworker can be thin, most employees have embraced the dual title for those they work with. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed consider two or more coworkers friends, with no significant differences between male and female respondents. Fierce has found in working with clients that the most productive employees have a *best* friend at work. Not a friend, not even a good friend, but a best friend. This detail was highlighted as well in a 1999 Gallup poll that discovered having a best friend at work pinpoints a dynamic of great workgroups.

Whether certain individuals are friends or not, the Fierce survey found that coworkers affect job satisfaction:

- Just 1 in 5 believe coworkers have no impact on their job satisfaction
- Two-thirds note their coworkers make their jobs more enjoyable
- For those indicating they are happy in their current role, only 7% say their coworkers make their job less enjoyable
- For those who are unhappy in their role, that number increases to 30%

“There is no doubt that our relationships with coworkers have a significant effect on our attitudes toward our jobs,” said Susan Scott, Founder and CEO of Fierce, Inc. “Are we happy to see our team members when we walk in the door each day? Is there a best friend in the mix? Do our relationships with coworkers create an environment that is fun to be a part of, or do toxic individuals make going to the office unbearable? The survey data is important for company leaders to pay attention to. Since employee satisfaction is intrinsically tied to the relationships between coworkers, what can leaders do to enrich those relationships? Creating an environment in which friendships can develop is a good start.”

Socializing on the Job

For many, the occasional happy hour or social lunch out of the office are valuable opportunities to connect with coworkers. However, less than 50 percent of those surveyed believe their bosses are supportive of employees socializing outside of the office. This is an area of disconnect between management and employees: only 44 percent of those in entry level positions believe their bosses are supportive of socializing, while nearly 60 percent of senior management believe the same.

This impacts satisfaction as well: of those unhappy in their current role, 28 percent say their organization is unsupportive of socializing outside of work; just four percent of those who are happy feel the same. If organizations are in fact supportive of these relationships, these results indicate there is more that can be done to communicate the support that is there.

Romance on the Job

While friendships at work seem to be flourishing, just a quarter of those surveyed admit to having engaged in an office romance. Those at the top of an organization (owners, executives and c-level staff), have the highest occurrence at nearly 40 percent. While it seems age would play a factor in this finding, as individuals in higher level roles are more likely to have had more years in the workplace, survey respondents 45 and older saw no greater occurrences of office romances than other ages.

Is it allowed?

While over 50 percent of senior management note romantic relationships are allowed at their organizations, only 30 percent of those in entry-level positions believe the same, signaling another significant discrepancy in communication between job levels.

- Nearly 40% of all those surveyed are unsure of their organization's policies
- Over a third claim their organizations allow romantic relationships between coworkers

"While communicating across an organization about an upcoming product release or re-branding is clearly necessary, so is ensuring that your employees understand the rules and expectations of an organization's policy regarding workplaces romances," continued Scott.

"These survey results highlight the lack of transparency around this topic, from small businesses to Fortune 500 organizations."

Stepping over the line?

An interesting discovery was that 1 in 5 respondents believe someone they work with has what they would consider an inappropriate relationship. As for being a distraction, office romances were seen as more distracting than close friendships, although nearly 40 percent of respondents noted neither are distracting. This is another area in which clarity around what is appropriate and what isn't could benefit an organization.

"The results of this survey confirmed what we emphasize at Fierce—that relationships amongst coworkers impact job satisfaction in a real way. Organizations need to be more transparent with company policies, and encouraging social interaction amongst coworkers is good for everyone," said Scott. "Of course, we believe that the conversation is the relationship, hence our focus on enhancing the outcomes of all conversations in the workplace."

For more information about Fierce, visit www.fierceinc.com

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About Fierce

Fierce, Inc. is an award-winning leadership development and training company that drives results for business and education by improving workplace communication. Fierce creates authentic, energizing, and rewarding connections with colleagues and customers through skillful conversations that lead to successful outcomes and measurable ROI. Tailored to any organization, Fierce principles and methods translate across the globe, ensure individual and collective success, and develop skills that are practical, easy-to-learn and can be applied immediately. Fierce's programs have been successfully implemented at blue-chip companies, non-profits, and educational organizations worldwide, including Ernst & Young, Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Coca-Cola, CARE, and Crate & Barrel. Fierce has received numerous industry and

business accolades. The company has been honored as an Inc. 500|5000 company six times, in 2011 was named to TrainingIndustry.com's "Companies to Watch" list, and for three years was selected a Seattle Business magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" in Washington lists.