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## Friendship Creation

“Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.” —Woodrow Wilson

During my early days as a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, I remember reading somewhere that people are most creative in the early-morning hours. So, hoping to cure a persistent case of writer’s block, I started coming to work at 8 a.m. Then 7 a.m. Then 6 a.m. Eventually, I found myself toiling away at my computer at 5 a.m.

As it turns out, another newbie reporter with a cubicle a few feet away had decided she too could write better early. Before we knew it, each of us was standing behind the other’s computer, inspiring new ideas for stories. As these predawn meetings became more and more frequent, so did our bonding over other struggles, in work and in life. It was the beginning of a friendship that would last for many years.

Memories like that ran through my mind when I read, with a heavy heart, about the state of friendship in the workplace. A recent survey of 1,200 workers by JobSage found that 33 percent who worked remotely said they had fewer work friends than before. One in five admitted to having no work friends at all. Women reported having fewer friends than men (52 percent versus 44 percent), and millennials and Gen Z

were the generations most likely to have no friends (39 and 21 percent, respectively). Clearly, this is not the future of work we want to see.

I won’t pontificate about the value of work friendship, because I know nearly all of us understand how truly important it is. Friends can relate to—and ease—many of the fears so common in early careers. They can remind you that no employer, no manager, no situation is perfect. And it is your friend who grabs the phone out of your hand when you’re about to quit.

In the survey, 95 percent of workers said that having a friend at work made them happier. Of particular note: 76 percent said the friendship made them more creative, and 74 percent that it made them more productive. I sympathize with our HR colleagues who work so hard to create environments that foster friendship among workers, whether it’s office parties or retreats or ping-pong tables in conference rooms.

But let’s be honest: so many of these efforts feel forced and artificial.

Still, just because we haven’t found the perfect recipe

for creating friendship in the office—or among colleagues working remotely—doesn’t mean we should give up. I’m here to tell you that the great decline of work friendships must stop. My hope is that someone is out there right now, at the crack of dawn, looking for answers. Maybe with a friend by her side. ▀

