



**Working at Cornell**

PEOPLE LEADERS TOOLKIT

# Making Connections



# How Meaningful Connections Can Enhance Your Employee's Experience

According to Cornell's New Hire Survey, employees who "knew someone well" before joining Cornell had a 30% greater five-year retention rate. Exiting employees who indicated "loneliness" was a factor in their decision to leave Cornell were 45% less likely to agree they would consider returning to Cornell if another attractive opportunity were presented. Yet, in the 2022 Employee Survey, nearly 50% of employees indicated that "loneliness" had created at least a little stress for them over the past year.

Making meaningful connections in the workplace (remotely or in-person) can be challenging for many employees. By facilitating opportunities to form meaningful connections, people leaders can better support their workteam to thrive.

## What does "meaningful connection" mean in the workplace?

Meaningful connection at work is described as connecting to colleagues authentically AND with something significant. The pandemic accelerated a re-evaluation of priorities. Employees are asking why they work for their employer. They want to know that a large portion of their work day and, therefore, their life isn't meaningless. People want to experience meaningful connections and connect to a meaningful purpose, something bigger than themselves.

## A meaningful connection in the workplace is composed of four parts

It is when employees feel connected to:

1. The university's mission, values, and leadership vision.
2. Their coworkers and managers through authentic relationships.
3. Their work has a positive impact on the university's goals.
4. Their aspirations - growing in ways that mean something to them.

Meaningful connections can result in increased happiness and engagement, less stress, and a healthier life, which translates into better work performance and supporting retention efforts.



NEW HIRES WHO INDICATED SOMEONE EXPLAINED HOW THEIR POSITION ALIGNS WITH CORNELL'S MISSION WERE 25% MORE LIKELY TO STILL BE AT CORNELL AFTER 5 YEARS.

## The role of the people leader in building meaningful connections

Connect your team to our commitment as Cornellians "to do the greatest good." Remind your team their work has an impact. Use these tips to build a meaningful connection to:

### 1. The university's mission, values, and leadership vision.

- Discuss which of the university's core values resonate with them and how it shows up in their work.
- Look for ways to make your employees' impact more tangible than just the bottom line.
- Collect testimonials of people positively affected by your team's work.
- Invite campus partners to speak at meetings.
- Debrief after university forums or divisional meetings to discuss how your team aligns with the information.

### 2. Their coworkers and managers through authentic relationships.

- Ask your team: What would it look like if we all decided to serve each other the same way we serve our students or clients? Promote the possibilities to become a standard.
- Create a space for team members to connect with one another.
- Bring the team together regularly and check in with each individual often.
- Invite the personal into meetings, such as sharing stories about your weekend activities.
- Support their participation in activities to meet their colleagues across the university, like - [Cornell Coworker Coffee](#), participation on University-level committees/groups like the [Employee Assembly](#), or by [volunteering](#) for one of Cornell's many events.

### **3. Their work has a positive impact on the university's goals.**

- Explain your department/unit's impact on the university's students, staff, faculty, alumni, parents, and other constituent groups.
- Share how your team serves our community right now.
- Look for new opportunities to serve our communities.
- Make [appreciation](#) a part of work. Express gratitude for your team, their skills, and their contributions.
- Celebrate big and small wins.

### **4. Their aspirations - growing in ways that mean something to them.**

- Remind your team that their work is an act of service to those they care about or something more they are striving for — families they are supporting, goals they are reaching, or charities they care about.
- Share university resources that improve their development in areas of their interest, such as eCornell or CULearn.
- Encourage them to join or create a [Workforce Affinity Group](#) based on their interests to grow in a personal area.



Cornell resources to support connections in the workplace

<https://hr.cornell.edu/culture/community/connect>

## A Sample of Employee Connection Opportunities



Supervisors and colleagues can use the Cornell [Appreciation Portal](#) to send kudos in real-time. Recognize your team with small tokens of appreciation in the form of points that can be redeemed through the Cornell store or Amazon.



The [Big Red Welcome](#) sends eligible employees newsletters filled with workshops, perks, networking opportunities, and resources tailored just for new hires.



The [Colleague Network Groups](#) are employee resource groups for traditionally underrepresented populations and their allies to find support and to inform leadership's efforts to create and sustain a culture of inclusion and belonging for staff and faculty.



Sign up for [Cornell Coworker Coffee](#) and get introduced to a different Cornell employee every month. Connect for a brief virtual chat, meet a new person, and learn about their area!



The [Cornell Outing Club \(COC\)](#) is a community of outdoor lovers who strive to provide trips of all types and for all skill levels!



The [Cornell Recreation Connection's](#) mission is to encourage camaraderie and the Cornell spirit among staff, faculty, and retirees by providing virtual and in-person social and recreational events. Get involved with the CRC to help create events.



[Workforce Affinity Groups \(WAGs\)](#) are employee-run communities based on interests like knitting, birdwatching, or cycling. Make new friends and connections! Find community with colleagues even if you're working remotely or hybrid.

## Additional resources related to connections in the workplace:

- ▶ [Connectable: How Leaders can Move Their Team from Isolated To All In](#) by Ryan Jenkins and Steven Van Cohen provides more detailed tips on alleviating loneliness and increasing connections in the workplace. It advises managers on ways to transform their cultures to be more connected, purpose-driven, and higher-performing for the future of work.
- ▶ Check out this short [video](#) on the importance of showing appreciation to create more connections at work.
- ▶ [Harvard Business Review: How Leaders Can Build Connection in a Disconnected Workplace](#)
  - With spontaneous moments of connection more challenging to recreate in a remote or hybrid environment, managers need to take a more proactive approach, especially given how important connection is to retention. The article offers practical ways to build stronger relationships on your team.
- ▶ [Purpose in Leadership: Why & How](#) - Purpose-driven leadership helps create a shared sense of direction, alignment, and commitment and fosters greater performance, persistence, and belonging at the organization.