

# How much is human connection really worth?

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Whether in the office or remote, human connection has the biggest impact on the success of your business.

# You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone

The office of 2019 was a bustling place, often seen as a barrier to freedom or even as a prison on sunny, warm days. "I could work so much better if I had fewer distractions," and "I want the freedom to work from home!" were common refrains.

We didn't know what we had.

Even as recently as Slack's [October 2021 Future Forum Pulse Report](#) only one-third of employees reported wanting to return to work, but our latest research has uncovered that the tide is quickly turning.

***The reason? Employees are really starting to feel the impacts of the lack of genuine human connection over these past couple of years.***

To discover more about the business value of human connections in the workplace, we surveyed 1,000 full-time, U.S.-based employees to understand how much human connection means to them, how connection affects their office and work life in 2022, and how we can tear down the roadblocks and facilitate an environment of connection to help our employees truly flourish.



# The newest “office perk” is connection

Prior to the events of 2020, discussions on how to attract, motivate, and engage employees consisted of a complex web of HR programs and physical incentives.

Companies sprang to add amenities like gyms, pool tables, and free snacks, with some of the more adventurous organizations even offering laundry/dry cleaning services and building things like rock climbing walls and LEGO® rooms — but most of these incentives lost their luster when virtually everyone was pushed to work from home.

The past couple of years have given our employees ample time to reflect on the role of their workplace relationships and what work actually means to them, and, as our research demonstrates, those beautiful open offices and personal chefs don't mean anything if we lack a sense of true human connection.

## Office (ä-fəs) noun: A place for human connection

The office used to mainly be viewed as “the place where the printer was,” but now...

**...more than half of our study respondents identified the key strength of the office as its unique ability to facilitate genuine human relationships with peers and co-workers.**

In fact, 4 out of the 5 most valuable in-office activities cited in our survey include connecting with co-workers, and 60% of respondents cited spontaneous interactions with co-workers as the number one benefit of being in the office.

...only 5% of respondents said the gym.



# 60%

**of all respondents felt that the most valuable aspect of working in-office was the ability to have spontaneous interactions with coworkers.**

## Visible > Physical

While it shouldn't be a big surprise that our employees value a sense of connection more than physical office perks, it's worth noting that they also saw connection as more important than the more traditional "office benefits" we're used to hearing about (like better

separation of work and personal life, improved productivity, better work/life balance, etc.). In fact, connection was a key differentiator for employee performance and several employee outcomes like employee satisfaction and retention:

# 94%

**of employees agreed that they're more productive when they feel connected to their colleagues, and employees who felt connected were more than 4 times as likely to say that they were very satisfied with their jobs and half as likely to leave within the next 12 months.**



## Connection improves perception

More than just increasing job satisfaction, our study uncovered another surprising correlation that happens with increased feelings of connection: When employees feel more connected to their co-workers and their company, their overall perception of their company improves.

Remember, what's changing these employees' perceptions isn't the company itself — the only difference between an employee believing their company embodies these qualities or doesn't is their level of connectedness.

**It's clear that human connection is integral to employee wellness and has the power to move the needle on key business outcomes.**

Fostering connection among employees isn't only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.

**When compared to employees who didn't feel actively connected to their workplace, connected employees were:**

**4.5x**

more likely to answer "strongly agree" that their workplace is more collaborative

**3x**

more likely to say that their workplace keeps them engaged

**5.5x**

more likely to report that their workplace motivates them to go above and beyond their job responsibilities

**7x**

more likely to agree that their company encourages innovation

**3.5x**

more likely to say that their company is a great place to work and would recommend it to others

**2x**

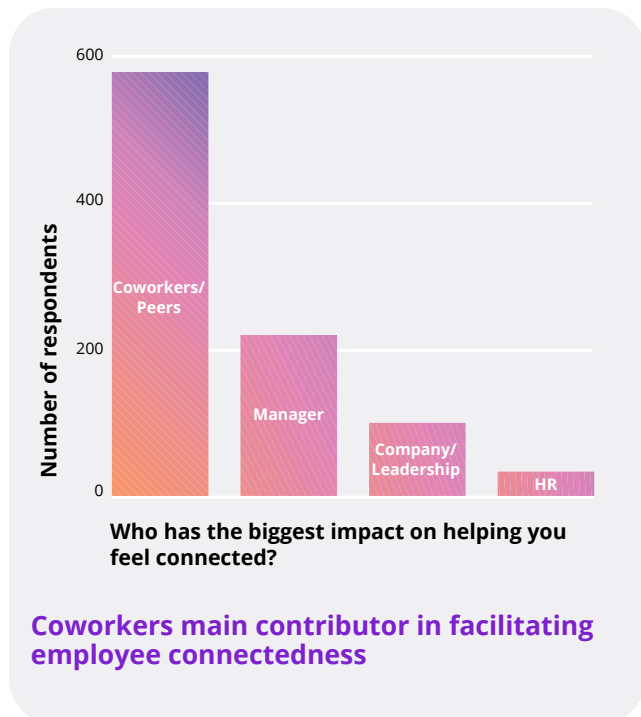
more likely to consider their company inclusive

# So, what makes our people feel connected?

First, some good news:

The majority of respondents (93%) we surveyed reported feeling connected to their coworkers, with more than half of them (56%) reporting that they feel very connected. This is much improved over [last year's survey](#), when only one-third of respondents reported feeling very connected.

We're trending in a positive direction, but it's critical that we keep up our progress and avoid pitfalls that can hurt our employees' productivity and morale.



## Connection comes from peers

While we've typically believed that managers had the biggest impact on helping our employees feel connected, in 2022 only one-quarter of respondents said this was the case. The majority of respondents (63%) actually noted that their coworkers had the biggest influence on their feelings of connectedness.

In addition, the top activities that employees reported helping them feel connected were team meetings, manager 1-on-1s, skill sharing with peers, and spontaneous in-office interactions with coworkers — things that we're likely already doing.

**This is great news because it means we don't need to start from scratch, designing new programs and "connection" events.**

**No, where we need to spend our energy is in ensuring that we're not putting up any barriers that would prevent our people from feeling the connection they so desperately need to thrive.**

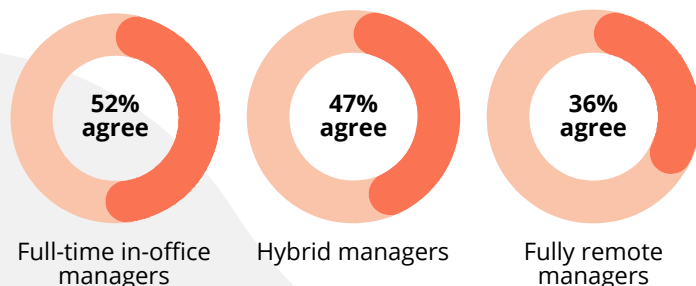
# What keeps our employees from feeling connected?



While peers and coworkers are the primary sources of our employee's feelings of connectedness, if we're not careful, managers can be the thing that kills the mood.

The top reasons employees report feeling disconnected include having different personalities and workstyles from their coworkers (34%), but this is followed closely by having unsupportive/passive managers (29%), lack of transparency in business decisions (26%), and working remotely (19%).

*"I'm currently struggling to provide enough human connection for my direct report(s) and/or team."*



## Managers have narrow but powerful impact

While only one-quarter of respondents said their manager had the biggest impact on their feelings of connection, the **respondents who said they were very disconnected were twice as likely to cite their manager as the cause.**

It's clear, especially as half of people managers agree they're struggling to provide enough human connection for their teams and direct reports, that we need to equip our leaders with the tools and training they need to successfully communicate with their teams.

## Lack of connection needs to be individually addressed

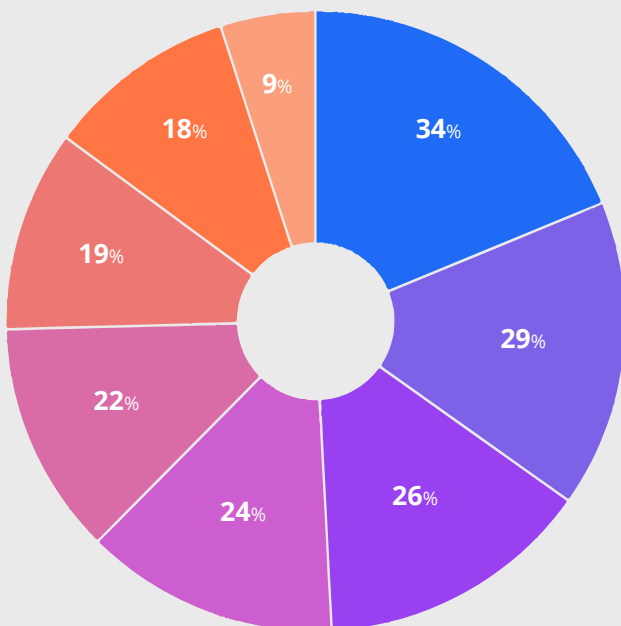
It's also worth noting that, while employees are generally feeling much more connected to their coworkers than they were even a year ago, this isn't consistent across the board.

For example, remote employees are more than 3x as likely to report feeling disconnected, while baby boomers reported the lowest rates of connection (44%) when compared to Gen Z (64%), millennials (63%), and Gen X (52%).

**Connection is a highly individual thing, so we need to be mindful of each individual employee and their specific feelings and needs.**



## What are the top reasons you feel disconnected at work?



### Different personalities/workstyles are the main reason employees feel disconnected

- Different personalities/workstyles from coworkers
- Manager doesn't provide much support
- Lack of transparency about big decisions
- I choose not to get involved
- My coworkers and I have different social identities
- I work remotely and it's difficult to get to know my coworkers
- There aren't company-sponsored events/opportunities
- The onboarding process didn't include opportunities for me to connect

\* participants were asked to select all that applied



# The true value of human connection

As we've seen, feeling a genuine sense of human connection is one of the biggest factors influencing our people's productivity, job satisfaction, and even their positive or negative perceptions of their workplace.

Thankfully, as employees settle back in and begin returning to the office (where possible), we're seeing a positive trend in these feelings of connectedness. But there are some clear

areas that need our attention to ensure we don't detract from these feelings.

We must remember connection is the foundation that supports every initiative. By putting human connections at the center of your business, you will enable connectivity, engagement, and growth.

## As you're looking to help your employees transition to the new way of work keep these key principles in mind:

### ⚡ CONNECT

Employees are hungry to feel more than a superficial connection to their peers and workplaces. We need to focus our efforts into creating an environment where **our people can establish genuine relationships and feel a true sense of belonging.**

### ⚡ ENGAGE

Engagement means much more than custom T-shirts and coffee mugs: **True engagement is bred from connection and ties into the greater purpose and mission of your organization.** People are happier and more productive (i.e. they're more engaged) when they feel a greater sense of connection.

### ⚡ GROW

Our employees want to grow, both personally and professionally. Making room for them to form meaningful relationships helps ensure they'll be successful in reaching their individual and corporate goals. (Remember: 71% of employees agreed that to learn something new or change their thinking, they need to discuss it with someone first. **People need people to learn and grow.**)

# Want to build more human connection into your workplace?

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