

LOL Journal, August 11, 2014

Are you friends with your colleagues at work? Should you be? We often get these questions from clients. The answers range from “I am good friends with my team mates” to “We work well together but I would not socialize with them, nor do I consider them my friends.” So, what is appropriate? I consider my partners at FCG as friends. And I like it that way. I think it is easier to work closely with people that you genuinely like. So, if you are wondering, “Are my work colleagues my friends?” here is a test crafted by Adam Grant (Wharton Professor).

Friendship test (with Jim Ware’s comments in brackets [...]):

1. You’ve actually met in person

From the caption of a famous *New Yorker* cartoon: “On the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” If you’ve only connected by email or phone, even if they are a real person, there’s no substitute for the trust that can be developed from meeting face-to-face. [Virtual teaming is hard for this reason. You don’t spend much face time with each other. Friendship aside, leaders especially need to get out of their offices and “touch” their team members. Too many investment leaders hide out in their offices, assuming that if they are not disturbed then all is well.]

2. You know embarrassing things about each other that don’t show up in a Google search

Studies consistently [show](#) that self-disclosure—opening up and making yourself vulnerable—is one of the strongest drivers of close relationships. My friends know that I have questionable taste in music, and refrain from dissing Bryan Adams. They accept the fact that I read the first *Twilight* book, cover to cover (my wife made me do it) and the rest of them (that was my doing). [Vulnerability builds trust and friendship. We recently worked with a Chief Legal Counsel who refused to be vulnerable (read: appear weak) with his team. As a result, they didn’t trust him. As he revealed his foibles and became human, the trust increased. So, look for opportunities to be human with your colleagues.]

3. You can call each other without scheduling a conversation

Unless the person in question is a head of state, if you have to get an appointment on someone’s calendar to talk, you haven’t cleared the friendship bar. [Very true. I only answer calls from my partners and good friends, the rest go to voice mail. I love “caller ID.” It lets me reclaim some control over my time!]

4. You never discuss the weather

When you ask a friend “How are you doing?” you don’t have to follow up with “No, really, how are you doing?” Friends don’t bother with small talk. They can go months without talking, and pick up as if they’ve never skipped a beat. They dive right into deep conversations about love, life, and that exasperating conclusion of *Lost* where nothing was resolved. [How true is that point about *Lost*!? I kept saying to my wife, “I’m gonna be pissed if they don’t resolve all this mysterious stuff.” Like what was the

significance of that number that kept appearing throughout the show!?! Needless to say, I was not happy with the end of that series!!! Anyway, I am not a small talker. (Early in my marriage my wife coached me: “honey, when we meet a new couple you might lead with ‘have you seen any good movies’ instead of ‘do you believe in free trade?’”) I have learned when to make small talk, but with my friends I like to dive into real topics.]

5. You help each other without keeping score

In professional relationships, I [find](#) that most people follow the norm of reciprocity: when we do someone a favor, we expect an equal one back. In friendships, the [norm shifts](#) from reciprocity to generosity. We focus on what our friends need, not what we can get back from them. Instead of keeping tallies of credits and debts, friends give whenever they can. As Jack Handey says, “If you wear a toupee, why not let your friends try it on for a while? Come on, we’re not going to hurt it.” [Huh? Not sure where Adam is going with the toupee thing. Anyway, generosity is a huge factor in successful leadership. I’ve been tracking this factor with successful leaders and I find a clear correlation: more generosity, better loyalty and results. Buddha was reported to have said to a disciple, “if you knew the truth about generosity, you would be giving all the time.” I love that quote. Next time you are with one of my colleagues, ask them if Jim Ware is generous, I think they will say “yes.” I hope so. People in the investment industry have much to be thankful for. We should be choosing “appreciation” (i.e. a generous mindset) over “entitlement” on a daily basis.]

6. You’ve had meaningful experiences together

Men and women alike [expect](#) friendships to involve mutual activities and shared memories. If you’ve never gone to a movie or shopping together, played a sport or game together, attended a party together, or decorated someone’s car with shaving cream together, you’re probably not friends. [How true. My partners and I travel together, which means we get stranded at airports together, trapped in bad-smelling taxis, and stuck in long security lines. You get to know each other pretty well after these experiences.]

7. You give the critical feedback that we don’t want to hear, but need to hear

Friendships have what the organizational scholars Jane Dutton and Emily Heaphy [call tensility](#)—the carrying capacity to withstand criticism and bounce back from strain. “We wouldn’t want to assume that compassion is always gentle,” George Saunders [observes](#). “A harsh truth can be compassionate... if a friend is wearing something ridiculous, you can say, ‘You look like an idiot,’ and maybe that will save him.” [Some time ago I had a bad rash on my head, and only ONE of my colleagues was willing to tell me, “Jim, you gotta stop scratching your head so much!” This was valuable feedback. I went to a skin doctor and he gave me some medicine that healed it completely. I never would have gone if that partner hadn’t spoken up! We are big believers in feedback, and it is seems easier to give it to a friend than a colleague. Even if BOTH need it!]

So, what is the answer? Should we be friends with all of our colleagues? All I can say with certainty is that I like it that way. And I think the test above is a good one to think about with regard to your colleagues. If your answer to any of the above is “no,” then what prevents you from deepening your

relationship? What is holding you back? The factors in Grant's test seem to apply equally well to trust as to friendship. And trust is always desirable.

Some of this LOL dealt with the theme of generosity (vs. selfishness). For more on that topic, see Adam Grant's fine new book, "Give and Take." <http://www.amazon.com/Give-Take-Revolutionary-Approach-Success/dp/0670026557>

Next LOL, I will write about the comp negotiations that we navigate. I will tie our practical work back to the best book ever written on negotiations, "Getting to Yes" by Fisher and Ury.

Until then...