

Report of the Vital Friends talk

Here is what Gavin Cargill of Value the Person International shared with us in September 2006.

Gavin opened his subject by saying it was not so much “touchy-feely” as “kicky-punchy”. He then mentioned the longstanding friendship between our Prime Minister and the Chancellor, so we got the idea!

Gavin has for some years been a student of the Gallup Organisation’s research findings. Gallup is known to many for conducting opinion polls, but that activity forms only 3% of its work. It does much more work in the areas of talent development and organisational practices, eg offering solutions for managing organisational performances.

In 1999 Gallup produced a book called “*First, Break all the Rules*” which became a management best-seller, especially because of its Q12 – a list of questions that helps you gauge how satisfying you find your work to be.

Last month Gallup brought out a book entitled “*Vital Friends: The People You Can’t Afford To Live Without*”. The author is Tom Rath. He discounts the notion that employers should discourage close friendships at work. Employers would be well advised in fact to do the exact opposite! Why? Because it makes economic sense. Quite simply, businesses that foster friendship do better.

Tom Rath and Gallup homed in further on question 10 in Q12: “Do I have a best friend at work?” They set out to examine this topic in a scientific manner and gathered hard evidence from no fewer than 7 million responses. They discovered some fascinating things.

For example, people who reported they had a best friend at work:

- had better safety records
- had higher customer loyalty scores
- were in more profitable teams
- were 6 times more likely to be fully engaged at work

Of those who did not have a best friend, only 8% were fully engaged at work.

Rath has looked at more than just the workplace. He has explored the significance of best friends in our private lives too. In short, our friendships affect everything from our overall attitude to our productivity. Here are some more of his findings:

- People with at least three close friends at work are 46% more likely to be extremely satisfied with their job and 88% more likely to be satisfied with their life.

- Spending time with your boss is rated as the least pleasurable time of the day. However, when employees do have close friendships with their boss, they are more than twice as likely to be satisfied with their jobs.
- Do friends shape your waistline? If your best friend has a healthy diet, you are more than five times as likely to have a very healthy diet yourself.
- Friendship is the silver lining in a marriage, accounting for approximately 70% of overall marital satisfaction. The “quality of the couple’s friendship” is found to be 5 times as important as “physical intimacy”.

Successful friendships are ones in which friends play a specific role in your life. There are 8 roles of friends defined in the book – see below. The fatal mistake in friendships is demanding one person fills most or every role.

The 8 roles of friends / the themes or gifts of friendship are:

- **Builders** – who motivate us
- **Champions** – who speak well of us
- **Connectors** – who act as bridges for us to others
- **Collaborators** – who share common interests
- **Companions** – who provide a close personal relationship
- **Energisers** – who lift us up
- **Mind Openers** – who help us think in new ways
- **Navigators** – who help us plan and think through challenges

NB the above list is in alphabetical order, not any order of importance.

In Rath’s book you find a unique PIN number which you can use it to do an internet exercise about one of your best friends. There are 65 questions and after 6 minutes you learn the top three things which that person brings you.

Looking into this topic also makes you think of course of what it is that you probably bring to others.

Gavin is passionate about the importance of valuing others. In looking for a “new metaphor” to encapsulate Value the Person’s philosophy and also Tom Rath’s findings, he has hit on a Rwandan word “ikirezi” meaning “precious pearl”. It is also the name of an imaginative and successful farmers’ cooperative in Rwanda set up by a certain Nicholas Hitimana who fled Rwanda to Scotland in 1999 during the genocide. He is a Hutu married to a Tutsi. (One supposes that they regard their marriage as a precious pearl, in spite of the desire of some in the past to eliminate it altogether...) The cooperative helps people widowed and orphaned in that dreadful genocide time. This “precious pearl” business venture produces essential oils from geranium plants. Gavin has been very taken by the enterprise. Reflecting on it has led him to state: “The experience of being valued is the essential oil for sustained success!”

We may add: “Friendships at work are an essential oil for sustained success!”

Click here to learn more about the Rwandan agribusiness “**ikirezi**” (<http://www.ikirezi.com/index.html>)

Comments:

- Gavin spoke to us in the week which marked the fifth anniversary of 9/11. He referred to that terrible event. We will all remember how hugely significant friendships were to the people caught up in that dreadful tragedy - whether they were among the perishing or the survivors.
- You may like to know, if you don’t already, that here in Britain there is an inspiring organisation that resonates with what Gavin brought us: it is the Relationships Foundation led by Dr Michael Schluter. An economist by training, he is now a leading campaigner and social reformer. In 1982 he established the **Jubilee Centre** (<http://www.jubilee-centre.org/>), a Christian think tank focusing on social and economic issues. In 1996 he launched the **Relationship Foundation** (<http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/index.php>). To quote this organisation’s own words: “We believe that the most important thing in life is relationships – the connections between individuals or between groups that create trust, loyalty, cooperation and support.”
- A thought: have we as human beings been designed to make and enjoy meaningful relationships and friendships? Does making these and sustaining these go with the grain of our very existence?
- Finally, FYI here are the Q12 questions:
 1. I know what is expected of me at work.
 2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
 3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
 4. In the last 7 days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
 5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
 6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
 7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
 8. The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
 9. My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing quality work.
 10. I have a best friend at work.
 11. In the last 6 months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
 12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.