

# Belonging through Acts of Interpersonal Inclusion

Have you ever thought that it's the people that you work with that make the job worth it? If you have, you aren't alone and there are some great reasons why you feel this way. Even better, if you are willing to commit to a few small acts, you can create a network of "work besties" that support one another in all the best ways. Through the small acts of interpersonal inclusion, we can each contribute to the creation of an inclusive workplace, with a culture of belonging wherever, and with whomever you work. How might you ask? Let's get into it.



Creating inclusive workplaces is more critical than ever with the staffing shortages that promise to become more significant. Attracting and retaining is not only an organizational issue, it is a pressing issue for staff as well. Staff vacancies create pressure on existing members, and it is a huge cause for burnout, that can start all the dominoes falling. While actions that support belonging and inclusion need the support of leadership, the work-peer relationship at work is significant, and has a tremendous impact on whether or not we feel fairly treated, validated, accepted and affirmed (which also just happen to be the indicators of belonging and dignity).

Research into the experiences of peers in an organization identified three ways in which we can create the inclusive environment we need to flourish at work.

1. Helping each other out. Also called "instrumental assistance," these are the little things that help a colleague to perform their tasks by providing necessary information, making introductions to contacts, giving endorsements in meetings (one way is amplifying their point and giving them credit, eg. "As Sue said, . . ."), and lastly by offering advice.
2. Taking emotional care of others. This refers to the care, support, encouragement and personal interest we demonstrate towards our peers that help to develop emotional bonds. This can take many forms: socializing, bantering, or simply providing space to share or vent. It requires that we show genuine interest in a colleague's personal life: their kids, dogs, hobbies, etc. It is also about checking in with your colleagues at a more personal level, not just on the topic of work.
3. Making physical connections. This one is not what you think. 😊 Also referred to as "embodied connection" this act of inclusion creates and communicates a closer association through body language and the sharing of space. Traveling together to a meeting, even if it is just walking down the hall, sitting next to one another, and the use of positive gestures such as a smile or a nod are some examples.

The biggest thing you should notice about the acts listed above, is that they are really very small, costing you virtually nothing in time, energy, or effort. These acts of interpersonal inclusion can also be implemented by anyone, even the person that is new and may be feeling a lack of belonging and inclusion. Gone are the days where inclusion is the acceptance of one into a group, where only the group or the leader of the group had the power to include.



Here is the next bit of good news. Not only are acts of interpersonal inclusion small, the benefits are huge! Individual job performance, job satisfaction and overall well-being improve. Team effectiveness is boosted, as are the flow of communication and speed of problem solving. Acts of inclusion also help employees grow and develop on the job.