

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan, for both pre-experience and in-work business students, is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 4/2012. In the article, two business professionals discuss the pros and cons of socializing with colleagues after or outside of work.

The tasks in the student worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and to practise useful business skills, such as summarizing, coming to an agreement and planning a formal email.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies, as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Warmer

These three questions introduce the topic indirectly by asking the students to think about how, where or even whether they socialize with their co-workers. The students should answer the questions by themselves and then discuss their answers with the whole class or in small groups.

Opinions and scanning for information

Ask the students to read the title question of the article and make a few notes in the first column of the table. Set a time limit of three minutes. After that time, put the students in pairs and ask them to compare their notes with each other. They should then scan both parts of the article, A and B, and make notes in the second column of the table. After they have done this, put them in different pairs to compare their answers and discuss their opinions again. Encourage them to share whether they have been influenced by either Katy Taylor-Gooby's or Simon Pitt's arguments.

Key (suggested answers):

<i>Reasons to socialize with your co-workers</i>	
<i>My thoughts and opinions</i>	<i>Points from the article</i>
<i>students' own answers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to strengthen work relationships and thereby encourage effective working • to make us more tolerant and enable us to understand each other • to talk openly and to network • to help solve work problems • to mix with people who understand the difficulties at work • to make new (long-lasting) friendships • to have fun
<i>Reasons not to socialize with your co-workers</i>	
<i>My thoughts and opinions</i>	<i>Points from the article</i>
<i>students' own answers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only thing you have in common may be that you work together. • You may only moan about work. • You may feel like your working day has been extended. • We need time away from work to recharge. • It's often better to talk about work with someone who is not directly involved and can see it from an outsider's point of view. • You may not want your boss or colleagues seeing you doing ridiculous things (at the pub or on Facebook). • It's not easy to keep the correct distance if your boss / employee becomes your friend. • You may be putting your relationship with your partner / spouse at risk. • You might end up spending too much time away from your family or (real) friends.

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

Key words

This task is divided into two parts which correspond to the two parts of the article. In the first part, the students match the words from Article A with the definitions. In the second part, the students need to look back at Article B and find the words for themselves. To make the task slightly easier, the words are in the order that they appear in the article.

Key:

A: 1. *tolerant*; 2. *tone*; 3. *frustrated*; 4. *pub*; 5. *goodwill*;
6. *charities*; 7. *bearable*

B: 1. *balancing act*; 2. *carpet*; 3. *recharge*; 4. *ridiculous*;
5. *salary*; 6. *crisps*; 7. *judgement*; 8. *affairs*; 9. *exception*

Extension:

The students put the words into sentences of their own to show that they have understood both sides of the argument. If possible, the sentences should be related to the content of the article.

Group discussion

Ask the students to read the rubric, then tell them that there is £60 (or the equivalent in euros or dollars) per person in the budget. Either have them work as a class or in two large groups and set a time limit of between five and ten minutes. Point out that if one or more people do not attend, none of them will get the money!

Writing an email

The students write an email to their boss outlining how they would spend the money offered to them for the social event. The students can plan the content of the email in pairs or groups and then each write their own email. Remind them to think about the tone and level of formality needed when writing to a superior, the language and set expressions they might use and the subject line, greeting and close of the email.

Teaching and learning strategy: Planning a formal email

Some teachers avoid writing tasks in class as they consider them to be uncommunicative. A way to make a writing task communicative is to introduce a planning stage which should be carried out in pairs or small groups.

The information discussed and agreed in this stage can then be used by the students individually to write their business emails or other piece of business writing. Guide the students through the planning stage by asking them to answer certain questions relating to the writing task.

Possible questions that will help the planning with example answers relating to the task:

Who am I writing to? my boss

What tone should I use? formal

Why am I writing? to give information about a decision made in the team

What information do I need in the body of the email? the decision / who it was taken by / that everyone was in agreement

Is there any formulaic language I can use?
Yes, e.g. *With reference to ...; I am looking forward to hearing from you.*

Which greeting and close should I use?
Dear Mr. ... / Kind regards

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: All together now
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/all-together-now/>

Business skills bank: Emailing 1
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-skills-bank/emailing/emailing-1/144605.article>

Business tasks: Talking
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/talking/157038.article>

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1 Warmer

Discuss the following questions in small groups.

1. Where do you go during your lunch break?
2. Where do you go immediately after work?
3. In both cases, who do you go with?

2 Opinions and scanning for information

- a. Think about the question in the title: *Should you socialize with your co-workers?* Write your thoughts and opinions into the first column of the table below.
- b. Scan both parts of the article (A and B) and complete the second column.

Reasons to socialize with your co-workers	
My thoughts and opinions	Points from the article
Reasons not to socialize with your co-workers	
My thoughts and opinions	Points from the article

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

Article A

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

by Rebecca Perl



YES!

“Going to a coffee shop or pub creates opportunities to talk openly”

KATY TAYLOR-GOOPY

Social events also provide valuable opportunities to network. They give you a rare chance to talk to the boss or to get friendlier with the head of a department you're interested in. Equally, building positive relationships with people you need for support or information helps you to get the job done more effectively.

We all have stressful days in the office. On those days, the people who can really help you feel better are your workplace friends, who are best able to understand what you've been through. Many post-work drinks have saved me from an office meltdown.

I think those work friends are the best reason of all for socializing with colleagues. The workplace can be a source of new friendships. You might start out chatting by the photocopier and, before you know it, you've become real-life friends. Personally, I have several dear friends I've met through my various jobs.

I have friends in the private sector who are under pressure to socialize with colleagues and clients, but this kind of forced networking is a different matter altogether. I've always worked for charities, and this has meant that I've generally worked with colleagues who think like me. For me, socializing makes work not only bearable, but also much more fulfilling and fun.

KATY TAYLOR-GOOPY is a press officer for the British Red Cross. She has also worked for Amnesty International and Raitt Orr & Associates, a PR agency

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1 I've worked in an office of over 400 staff and in an office with four staff. In both cases, I found that socializing with colleagues was of considerable benefit. Good relationships in the workplace are so important if you are to work effectively, and seeing co-workers in a different context can really do something to help these relationships.

2 The endless meetings, emails and phone calls at work leave little time for informal chats. And the pressure of deadlines can make us less tolerant than we'd like to be. For example, it's easy to misunderstand a colleague's tone or, without realizing it, to communicate only partial information in an email. So, people working according to different priorities often get frustrated by each other.

3 Getting away from work and going to a coffee shop or pub creates opportunities to talk more openly. It's easier to create goodwill when you're free of the office atmosphere. Very often, I have understood colleagues' points of view much better after talking to them over drinks. More than once, I've solved work problems outside the office that were starting to become dramas.

3 Key words

Match the definitions with the key words from Article A.

1. willing to accept someone else's beliefs or way of life without criticizing them, even if you disagree with them
2. the sound of someone's voice that shows what they are feeling
3. feeling annoyed and impatient
4. a place where people go to drink alcohol, especially in the UK and Ireland
5. a feeling of wanting to be friendly and helpful to someone
6. organizations to which you give money so that they can give money and help to people who are poor or ill, or who need advice and support
7. something that is difficult or unpleasant but you are able to accept or deal with it

goodwill

bearable

tolerant

frustrated

pub

tone

charities

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

Article B

Should you socialize with your co-workers?

by Rebecca Perl



NO!

“If you go out with co-workers, you’re going to talk about one thing: work”

SIMON PITT

and, because of their different viewpoint, have been able to solve it.

We all know how dangerous it is to be friendly with your boss on Facebook, but it’s even worse if they see you doing ridiculous things. It may seem funny at the time, but next year, when they are reviewing your salary, putting those crisps up your nose at the Christmas party might not seem to have been a good idea.

If you’re in a position of responsibility, it gets even worse. As a manager, you set the tone for your working environment. And it’s difficult to keep the correct distance if the people you’re managing are friends. If you become too friendly, it affects your judgement. You may end up promoting the colleagues you like, rather than the best employees.

And let’s look at the statistics. Fifty per cent of all affairs happen at work. By socializing with co-workers, you’re putting your relationships at risk. More than that, you’re spending more time away from your real friends and family.

There may be cases where you’re genuinely friendly with people at work. But these people are the exception. I think you should spend time with your real friends, and not just the people who are nearby when you get to the end of the working day.

SIMON PITT is the software compliance manager at the BBC. He has worked in broadcasting for five years. The views expressed here are his and not those of the BBC.

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- 1 Of course, you should be friendly with your co-workers. But it’s a balancing act, and if your co-workers become your main social network, then you have a problem. As Tim says in the BBC comedy series *The Office*, “The people you work with are people you were just thrown together with. You don’t know them; it wasn’t your choice. And yet you spend more time with them than you do with your friends or your family. But probably all you have in common is the fact that you walk around on the same bit of carpet for eight hours a day.”
- 2 When you go out with your co-workers, you’re going to talk about the one thing you all have in common: work. And you’re not going to be saying how much you like work, either – you’re going to be talking about the bits you don’t like. Before you know it, you don’t enjoy your job because you’re spending all your free time complaining about it. And more than that, you’ll feel like you’re at work longer. We need time away to recharge.
- 3 I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve struggled to solve a problem at work, but then spoken to someone outside work

3 Key words

Find words and expressions in Article B to match the definitions.

1. the process of trying to achieve something that different groups will be satisfied with _____
2. floor covering _____
3. to rest after being very busy, so that you will be ready to start working again _____
4. silly or unreasonable and deserving to be laughed at _____
5. a fixed amount of money that you earn each month or year from your job _____
6. thin, flat, round pieces of potato that have been cooked in fat and are eaten cold _____
7. your ability to understand a situation well and make good decisions _____
8. sexual relationships between two people, especially when one of them is married to someone else _____
9. someone or something that is different in some way from other people or things and so cannot be included in a general statement _____

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4 Group discussion

Your company has some money left over in its budget which you must 'use or lose'. This money may only be used for an outing, day trip or social event for the people working in your department / team. However, the event has to take place outside your normal working hours (not in company time).

You will be told how much you have to spend. Try to come up with an idea that is acceptable to *everyone* in your group.

5 Formal email

Write an email to your boss outlining your proposal for a social event and explaining how the money would be spent.

