

**UPDATE****Summer 2025**

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## Digital vs. In-person Connections: Finding Balance

*Custom strategies and programs to support how we live, work and interact*

In all we do, “human beings are, by nature, social creatures,” states strategic marketing expert, Christine Muldoon, “We rely on interactions with others to fulfill our need for connection and belonging,” along with survival.

Perhaps no recent experience better challenged this social need than the COVID-19 pandemic. Seemingly overnight, we were forced to change how we connected and interacted in our homes, in public and at work. Although technology helped us maintain contact, it proved to be no substitution for person-to-person connection. As a result, relationships and the benefits of those connections suffered. Now, some five years later, there is a growing initiative by employers to acknowledge the value of face-to-face interaction and actively cultivate that engagement in the workplace.

More specifically, Muldoon notes that we spend up to a third of our lives at work and a lack of social connections there can negatively affect employee well-being and workplace culture, which in turn can adversely impact the ever-critical bottom line. Advancements in digital technologies have provided organizations with more streamlined, efficient processes and practices, but at what expense to human needs and interests? How can we reach a balance?

It is important to distinguish the difference between simply being connected by circumstance and actually *connecting* with each other through an enduring, emotional relationship. Building those strong connections at work minimally requires regular engagement with open communication and clarity of purpose. Co-workers who know they are seen and heard feel valued, and are more productive, dedicated, and satisfied.

Leadership expert Randy Conley has identified the following four basic pillars of employee engagement:

- The need for **Trust**.
- The need to have **Hope**.
- The need to feel a **Sense of Worth**.
- The need to feel **Competent**.

Conley concludes the above four needs are not merely nice to have. They are fundamental human needs that must be met for employees to truly thrive. This investment in social capital not only supports the “bottom line,” but creates a workplace where people grow passionate about what they do, with whom they work and for whom they serve.

### Tips for Enhanced Human Connections

- Set tech use boundaries such as no phones during meetings.
- Take walks or lunch breaks with colleagues.
- Prioritize face-to-face contact instead of online texts or email.
- Avoid digital distractions during conversations.
- Engage in shared activities of common interest.
- Make time beyond business talk for informal interaction.

A recent study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania found that reducing social media use significantly decreased feelings of loneliness and depression. In so doing we are able to focus more on the people around us and the meaningful connections we can make and nurture offline.

Source: Inspiration Unlimited eMagazine

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