HIGH-QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS RESOURCES GUIDE

Institute For Well-Being In Law

In alignment with Love Your Lawyer Day (November 5, 2022) and World Kindness Day (November 13, 2022), IWIL has selected High-Quality Relationships as its November 2022 well-being theme. This Guide provides information and resources that you can use individually, as a team, or to support organization-wide education or activities to better understand the importance of relationship-building and the myriad of ways that high-quality relationships can be formed.

SCIENCE LINKS HIGH-QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS WITH WELL-BEING & PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

The relationships we build with people from all parts of our professional lives are a key component of our well-being and success. In the U.S. Surgeon's new Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being Guidelines, aspects of relationship quality are imbued in all "Five Essentials," defined as (1) Connection & Community, (2) Work-Life Harmony, (3) Mattering at Work, (4) Opportunity for Growth, and (5) Protection from Physical and Psychological Harm.

The central role of relationships in the new Guidelines is not surprising. Our need for high-quality relationships to flourish is considered to be among the best-supported hypotheses in the scientific study of human well-being. A long line of studies across disciplines establish that the need for connection has a powerful impact on our lives. It affects many aspects of our functioning—including how we think, feel, and behave as well as our mental and physical health (Brafford, 2017).

The need for connection includes high-quality, reciprocal interpersonal relationships in which we feel cared for and care for others. It also includes the experience of belonging and acceptance in groups that matter to us. Workplace belongingness has been defined as feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the organization. Low scores on workplace belonging scales are strongly associated with depressive symptoms

As to our physical health, research shows that, when we interact with people we view positively, we get a physiological boost—our blood pressure, immune system, and beneficial hormones (like oxytocin) all are positively affected.

High-quality relationships also can substantially influence job satisfaction, work engagement, and the development of interpersonal influence that helps achieve career goals (Brafford, 2017).

Challenges For The Legal Profession

The legal profession's often fast-paced, pressure-cooker cultures can be an obstacle to high-quality relationships. For example, research has found that time-pressures undermine the critical relationship skill of empathy—even for naturally empathetic individuals (Brafford, 2017).

Additionally, organizational cultures often fail to prioritize people-oriented activities. In a recent Law360 article about factors contributing to burnout in the legal profession, IWIL Vice President Anne Brafford noted the following:

> "[D]ue to firms' historic blind spot to the importance of the human side of work, lawyers may not have developed the interest,

commitment or skills for people development.

For example, [Thomson Reuters' 2022 Report on the State of the Legal Market] found that activities related to developing internal relationships, well-being, diversity and inclusion, and training were unpopular among surveyed lawyers, who did not consider such activities as central to their vocation as lawyers.

Disengagement in such people-oriented activities — which are essential for... retention and engagement — has likely been exacerbated by the pandemic."

Curb Workplace Incivility

A failure to prioritize relationships can create a breeding ground for incivility. Too many legal professionals have complained about a lack of collegiality, feeling unappreciated or taken for granted, and being treated as if they were fungible. These concerns align with nation-wide surveys finding that workplace incivility has been on the rise (Brafford, 2017).

Incivility encompasses low-intensity acts of disrespect, whether or not they're intentionally malicious. Example behaviors include:

- Embarrassing or belittling others
- Using a condescending tone, rudeness, and sarcasm
- Treating others like they're invisible and taking them for granted.

Chronic incivility is corrosive. It depletes people's energy and motivation, increases burnout symptoms, and inflicts emotional and physiological damage (Brafford, 2017). Incivility generally also diminishes productivity, performance, creativity, and helping behaviors for targets of the behavior and for those who see or hear about it (Brafford, 2017).

Eliminate Workplace Microaggressions

Uncivil behaviors can take the form of "microaggressions," which are subtle slights, insults, and invalidations that target people due to marginalized social identities (Washington, 2022). They often are unintentional and unconscious and can be interpersonal or organizational (e.g., policies). Microaggressions can accumulate over time and contribute to mental health problems and other negative outcomes (Fisher et al., 2018).

A 2020 Gallup survey found that Hispanic, Asian, and Black Americans all reported experiencing more microaggressions than White adults in the prior 12 months—but the highest prevalence was against Black adults. For example, one in three Black adults (32%) said that, in the past year, people have acted as if they were "better than you," while one in four (25%) said people have acted as if "you were not smart" (Lloyd, 2020).

Examples of microaggressions against women include sexist language, comments that imply women are incompetent or inferior, sexist humor, or denying the existence of sexism.

LGBTQ+ employees also experience exclusion and microaggressions consisting of, for example, coworkers and supervisors misgendering them, tokenizing/exoticizing their identities, using derogatory language when referring to members of LGBTQ+ communities in general, not acknowledging the relationships and families of LGBTQ+ employees, and excluding LGBTQ+ employees from the social environment at work.

Because such acts don't have "micro" effects, some say the term should be retired (Tulshyan, 2022). In fact, they're comparable to more overt forms of discrimination in their association with negative psychological, physical, and workplace effects on the targets (Jones et al., 2016). For example, incivility or microaggressions against people of color that are interpreted as motivated by race or ethnicity trigger an immediate stress response that may have long-term health effects (Ortega, 2022).

Create High-Quality Connections

We should strive not only to eliminate incivility and microaggressions but also to affirmatively foster high-quality relationships with mutual trust, respect, and commitment—which research shows contribute to the best individual and workplace outcomes.

Being mindful even of the micro-moments of connection that we have throughout the day can make a big difference. Little bits of energizing and uplifting interactions that occur minute-to-minute during our work days are building blocks of high-quality relationships ([Brafford, 2017](#)).

These micro-moments of energizing connection—labeled "high-quality connections" (or "HQCs") by researchers—are associated with many positive workplace outcomes, including:

- Improving cognitive performance and learning.
- Facilitating recovery from losses.
- Enhancing the cardiovascular and immune systems.
- Fostering the creation of positive meaning in work.
- Building trust and psychological safety.
- Improving work processes such as coordination, collaboration, and error detection ([Brafford, 2017](#)).

To foster HQCs, we'll want to pay attention to the people that constantly surround us and not define their worth solely as a function of our needs. When we get busy or distracted, we can slip into treating others as invisible or as mere means to our chosen ends. We can lose track of just how powerfully our behaviors (big and small) can impact those around us ([Brafford, 2017](#)).

3 Strategies for Building High-Quality Connections

Below are three recommended strategies for building HQCs:

Strategy 1: Enable Others' Success By Providing Resources and Removing Obstacles

When we remove obstacles for others or provide them with resources like information, emotional support, and political capital, their empathy for our perspective increases as does their feelings of gratitude, which improves the quality of the connection. Enabling behaviors also trigger a sense of reciprocity: Helping others makes them want to return the favor—which triggers an upward, positive spiral in the relationship (Brafford, 2017).

In his bestselling book *Give and Take*, Wharton School professor Adam Grant (2012) discusses the substantial evidence showing that people who consistently enable others' success are more motivated and successful themselves. Helping others also reduces harmful physiological responses to stress. So, facilitating others' success not only fosters HQCs, it's also good for our own health and success (Brafford, 2017).

Behaviors to implement Strategy 1 include:

- ✳️ Give advice, expertise, and motivation
- ✳️ Make another's job easier/remove obstacles
- ✳️ Teach others something
- ✳️ Advocate for them
- ✳️ Accommodate their needs
- ✳️ Nurture their development

Strategy 2: Build Trust By Being Trustworthy and Acting With Trust

Trust is an essential and profoundly important factor for good relationships. We develop trusting relationships by both being trustworthy and acting with trust.

Trustworthiness is a complex idea, which generally is viewed as made up of three parts: (1) ability, defined as having the knowledge, skills and ability to perform the job well; (2) integrity, which includes adhering to moral standards, fairness, and aligning words with actions; and (3) benevolence, which entails showing genuine

concern and consideration for others.

Dr. Paul Zak, a neuroscientist and economist at Claremont Graduate University, has identified the neurochemical explanation for this self-fulfilling cycle in which "trust begets trust" (Zak, 2017, p. 16). He has extensively studied the influence of the powerful hormone oxytocin on empathy and behavior. Oxytocin often is referred to as the love hormone because of its relationship with feelings of connection and empathy.

In his book *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performance Companies,* Dr. Zak places oxytocin and trust at the center of organizational success. His research shows that, when we feel trusted by others, our brains produce oxytocin, which makes us want to be trustworthy in return. He describes oxytocin as the biological basis for the Golden Rule: If you're nice to me, my brain produces oxytocin. This signals that you're someone I want to be around, and so I treat you nice in return (Zak, 2017).

When we act cooperatively and treat others well, our brains are rewarded again with a spike of oxytocin that makes us feel good for doing good. In organizations where people are consistently respected and treated well, oxytocin will continue to fuel a cycle of trust that helps the organization succeed. When fear dominates, the cycle will stall.

Behaviors to implement Strategy 2 include:

- ✴️ Share valuable information
- ✴️ Nurture others' development
- ✴️ Use inclusive words (e.g., "we")
- ✴️ Disclose something about yourself
- ✴️ Convey your positive intent
- ✴️ Give access to valuable resources
- ✴️ Solicit and act on input (Brafford, 2017).

Strategy 3: Respectfully Engage With Others

Respectful engagement includes being present and genuine with others, communicating support and encouragement, acting in caring ways, and treating people with dignity (Brafford, 2017).

Research on civility, dignity, and respect reflect that everyday behaviors—even micro-behaviors—communicate how one person values another. This includes non-verbal behaviors, which make up more than 80% of a message. Tone of voice, facial expressions, body posture and position, and eye contact, for example, convey attention and interest just as much, if not more, than the words being expressed (Brafford, 2017).

One important signal of respect and care that we may often overlook is *listening.* We show respect and positive regard by truly listening to others with goals of understanding and providing support—rather than interrupting or being distracted by our own thoughts of what to say next. People can detect a lack of responsiveness and support and it negatively impacts relationship quality and positive regard. When people feel that we're listening to them, their brains' reward system lights up, and they feel more positive and cooperative toward us (Brafford, 2017).

Behaviors to implement Strategy 3 include:

- ✴️ Be accessible
- ✴️ Pay attention to others
- ✴️ Be present
- ✴️ Listen
- ✴️ Convey others' value
- ✴️ Give affirmations
- ✴️ Be empathetic
- ✴️ Ask rather than order/demand
- ✴️ Use descriptive language rather than judgmental language when conveying feedback (Brafford, 2017).

Recommended resources for learning more about benefits and strategies for developing high-quality relationships are below.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-QUALITY WORK RELATIONSHIPS & HOW TO BUILD THEM

✨ **Knudson, Martha, High-Quality Relationships Are Vital to Health, Performance, and Professional Success, IWIL Blog (2020).**

Key Quote: "[H]igh-quality workplace relationships and perceiving that you have social support impacts many things we care about professionally. It enhances our cognitive processes and our creativity, and it boosts work engagement. It also helps us to like our jobs more, so we are less likely to leave. These things translate to quantifiable performance gains for our legal organizations."

✨ **Mind Tools Content Team, Building Good Work Relationships: Making Work Enjoyable and Productive, MindTools.com.**

Nutshell: Defining the characteristics of a good relationship, identifying the most important relationships for development, 9 steps for building good relationships, and 3 steps for handling difficult relationships.

✨ **Scott, Elizabeth, Effects of Conflict and Stress on Relationships, VeryWellMind.com (2020).**

Key Quote: "Here are a few ways that conflicts in a relationship can affect you physically and mentally, as well as some tips for how to cope."

✨ **Grenardo, David A., A Lesson in Civility, 32 Geo. L. Rev. 135 (2019).**

Key Quote: "This Article demonstrates how civility applies to advocacy and the practice of law, the efficiency of our justice system, lawyer well-being, obtaining a job and professional identity formation, and public confidence in the legal system."

✨ **Legal Talk Network, The Current State of Civility in the Legal Profession (May 29, 2020).**

Nutshell: Podcast guests discuss the current state of civility in the courts, the use of overly aggressive litigation tactics, and how the legal profession is promoting civility through various methods.

✨ **The Legal Toolkit Podcast, Being Likeable and Building Relationships in the Legal Profession (Sept. 15, 2015).**

Nutshell: Developing a good rapport with clients and trust among your fellow attorneys can lead to better case results, happier clients, and a more pleasurable work environment. In this episode of The Legal Toolkit, Heidi Alexander interviews Jason Treu, former lawyer turned marketer and business coach, about building relationships, social engineering, and practical steps lawyers can take to improve their networking skills.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS DIFFERENCES

Although it can be easier to connect with people who are like us, creating connections across differences is one way we learn and grow, create the experience of workplace inclusion, and ensure that people from all backgrounds have essential developmental relationships. We can develop skills for doing so, but it requires intentional practice.

An important set of skills and characteristics for developing relationships across difference can generally be referred to as *cultural competencies.* The ABA's recent revision to law school accreditation requirements has put the spotlight on the importance of "cross-cultural competence" for the legal profession. Resolution 300 requires law schools to integrate education about cross-cultural competence to aid representation of diverse clients. But cultural competencies also are important for fostering positive relationships and inclusion with our colleagues.

A variety of labels have been used for cultural competencies, including "cross-cultural competence," "intercultural effectiveness," "cultural intelligence," and "intercultural competence"—just to name a few. These approaches generally can be synthesized as follows: Cultural competencies are the attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and skills needed to improve "interactions across difference,

whether within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders" (Deardorff, 2020, p. 5). This definition expands the focus beyond race, ethnicity, and cross-border interactions and highlights that all types of social identify differences can create obstacles to effective relationships and communication.

Cultural competencies contribute to many positive workplace outcomes including, for example, the experience of inclusion, leader effectiveness, tolerance of diversity, less prejudice, positive relationships, trust, task and team performance, more cooperative behavior, greater information-sharing, and more diverse networks.

Developing cultural competencies is a complex, life-long endeavor of building awareness of one's own culture and cultural differences of others, interpersonal skills, and personal characteristics that foster openness to differences. A few relevant resources to get started are below.

- ✴ Bridging Differences Playbook: Research-based strategies to promote positive dialogue and understanding, Greater Good Magazine.

- ✴ Saymeh, Amal, Multicultural Competence: 8 Ways Businesses Can Work with Culture. BetterUp.com (2021).

- ✴ Bernardo, K., & Deardorff, D. K., Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities & Models (2012) (Book)

- ✴ McWilliams, Allison E., How to Build Relationships Across Differences. Psychology Today.com (2022).

- ✴ Mayes, Amber, Alliances Across Difference: Useful Strategies for Building Effective Relationships Across Difference (2015).

- ✴ Abbott, Ida, O., & Boags, R. S., Mentoring Across Differences: A Guide to Cross-Gender and Cross-Race Mentoring. MCCA.com (2006).

- ✴ Sutton, J., How to Develop Empathy: 10 Exercises & Worksheets. PositivePsychology.com

(2020).

- ✴ Epley, N., Be Mindwise: Perspective Taking vs. Perspective Getting. Behavioral Scientist (2014).

- ✴ Worksheet: Robinson, Denise, Connecting Over Things In Common, WWIL Worksheet (2021).

- ✴ Self-Assessments:

- • Cultural competence self-assessment checklist. AVMA.org.

- • Bridging Differences Quiz, Greater Good Magazine.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS CAN SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

✴ **Brafford, Anne, Supervisor Relationships Are Key to Beating Attorney Burnout, Law360 (2022)**.

Key Quote: "Whether we look at research on burnout, engagement, inclusion, or mental health, scholars consistently point to one factor as essential: high-quality relationships with direct supervisors, who are the linchpins of employee work experience. Such relationships are critical for retention. Gallup research has found, for example, that it took a pay raise of more than 20% to hire most employees away from managers who engage them."

✴ **Houston, Elaine, The Importance of Positive Relationships in the Workplace, PositivePsychology.com (2019).**

Key Quote: "Given the organizational and personal benefits of positive workplace relationships, creating opportunities for and fostering positive social interactions should be a paramount objective for team leaders and managers....In general, maximizing engagement levels can be boiled down to two key concepts: removing barriers that limit social interaction in the workplace and creating opportunities for employees to engage with each other."

HIGH-QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS IN LAW SCHOOL

⭐ **Indiana Center for Postsecondary Research,** Law School Survey of Student Engagement: Relationships Matter **(2018).**

Nutshell: Data obtained from the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) provides a compelling look at the importance of relationships in law school. Data from this Report, *Relationships Matter,* draw from the responses of more than 18,000 students at 72 law schools who participated in the LSSSE Survey in 2018.

⭐ **New England Law Blog,** How to Build Genuine Relationships with Your Law Professors**.**

Key Quote: "Your professors can be your biggest and best mentors, resources, and champions in law school and even after you graduate....Of course, these relationships don't happen overnight. But if you follow this advice, you'll be prepared to cultivate meaningful connections with your law professors—and be the kind of student they want to see."

HIGH-QUALITY CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

⭐ **Bower, Phoebe & Taleyarkhan, Pervin R.,** Building Effective Client Relationships: Practice Tips from In-House**, Landslide, Vol 11 No. 3 (2019).**

Key Quote: "Most practicing attorneys can look back and identify a few great client relationships—those that they would strive to recreate every time—and a few that have not been as effective...While there may be no specific formula for recreating that same great client relationship in every situation, [there are] consistent truths that will prove helpful in any in-house attorney-outside attorney client relationship."

⭐ **MBO Partners,** Client Relationships Guide: 13 Ways to Build Strong Client Relationships**.**

Nutshell: Building a strong relationship with your clients earns their trust and re-engaging you will save them time and money. Once a client knows that you are dependable and can successfully perform the

tasks required for a project, they will be more likely to engage you on future matters.

⭐ **Matich, Teresa,** 5 Tips to Improve Law Firm Client Relationships**, Clio.com.**

Nutshell: Whether you're starting a new practice, or just looking to brush up on your law firm business development skills, this list includes several valuable tools to build positive client relationships and ensure sustainable growth for your law firm.

⭐ **2Civility.org,** 5 Ways Attorneys Can Increase Their Cultural Competence **(2022).**

Key Quote: "Attorneys, who are in the client services business, often encounter clients and potential clients who don't look or act like them. While it can be more comfortable to take on clients who share a similar background, attorneys who overlook diverse and often underrepresented groups are missing a significant untapped market."

⭐ **Bryant, Sue & Peters, Jean K.,** Five Habits of Cross-Cultural Lawyering and More **(2022)**

Key Quote: "We believe that all lawyering is cross-cultural, so teaching about cross-cultural lawyering is necessary [for lawyers and law students] to provide quality representation to their clients. We also believe that the measure of good cross-cultural lawyering is the respect a lawyer has for her client's dignity, voice, and story, and the lawyer's understanding of her own biases and ethnocentric world views."

⭐ **Weng, Carwina,** Multicultural Lawyering: Teaching Psychology to Develop Cultural Self-Awareness**, Clinical L. Rev., 11, 369 (2004).**

Key Quote: "[M[ulticultural lawyering training should begin with the lawyer's self-analysis of his/her culture and its influences on the lawyer. Such cultural self-awareness is considered in social science to be the key to multicultural competence[.]"

WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW ACTIVITY GUIDES FOR BUILDING CONNECTION

- ✴ [Connecting Over Things in Common Activity Guide](#).

- ✴ [Grow Your Gratitude Activity Guide](#).

- ✴ [Lessen Loneliness Activity Guide](#).

- ✴ [Meaningful Connection Through Movies Activity Guide](#).

- ✴ [Ripples of Kindness at Work and Home Activity Guide](#).

- ✴ [Loving-Kindness Meditation Activity Guide](#).

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USE OF THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

This Resource Guide should not be considered legal or mental health advice or as an endorsement of any of the listed resources by the Institute for Well-Being in Law. It is provided for information purposes only, and you should personally evaluate all resources for fit and effectiveness for the purpose for which you plan to use them.

ACTS OF KINDNESS IDEAS FOR BOSSES, COLLEAGUES, STAFF, & CLIENTS

- Tell them why you appreciate them.
- Offer to help them with a difficult project or meet a tight deadline.
- Send them flowers.
- Bring their favorite kind of coffee.
- Make sure they know why they and their work matters.
- Admit to them when you're wrong.
- Invite them to lunch.
- Put your phone away when with them.
- Tell them thank you.
- Write, make, or buy something to provide encouragement when they're experiencing difficulties.
- Praise them to others.
- Really be present and listen to them without interrupting.
- Learn something new about them.
- Look for opportunities to make helpful introductions.
- Celebrate their accomplishments.
- If they're overwhelmed with personal or work challenges, ask if you can help in some way.
- Forward articles or other useful information that may interest them.
- Buy them a book they'll love.
- Scout for reasons to compliment them.
- Send them greeting cards on holidays.
- Notice and note their progress on something important to them.
- Compliment everyday good performance or contribution.
- When you open your inbox each day, make the first email you write a compliment, note of support or appreciation, or other positive jolt.
- Share credit with them.
- Make them laugh.