

Friend or a Foe? – Unveiling and Managing Frenemies at Workplace

Dr. Sofia Jasmeen

Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration,
Jubail University College for Female Branch, Jubail Industrial City,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Jasmeens@ucj.edu.sa

Abstract

Human beings are social creatures. The fact that we spend almost one third part of our life at work place, strongly necessitates having respectable and harmonious relations at the work place. If the colleagues and the co-workers are amicable and affable, then the job becomes more enjoyable. The person feels motivated and is surrounded by positives vibes. The performance would definitely be beyond the targets.

But, the bitter truth is that workplace relationships are complex. Understanding the workplace dynamics is a job itself. There is cut throat competition for survival among colleagues. Friends at work who are trusted confidantes, who cooperates with you, are your closest competitors. Co-workers who play a double role of encouraging you, may also disparage you in front of others. Such friends are actually your enemies masquerading as friends. You might call these people “frenemies”. The present research is empirical in nature. The focuses is on Frenemies as a significant concept of work place relationships and aims to bring to light the types of frenemies and tactics to identify and manage them.

Key Words

Frenemies, Ambivalence relations, Managing Frenemies

Introduction

This is an undeniable fact that in every workplace, there is fierce competition. Work places are full of people who will do anything to get ahead of you. One of the prevalent problems with this type of competition is that you may never know where your frenemy is lurking and so the susceptibility of falling prey to a Frenemy increases.

Who is a frenemy?

It is a person who acts like a friend until they suddenly decide to stab you in the back. Dictionary defines “Frenemy” as “one who pretends to be a friend but is actually an enemy”. One of the sources in internet mentions that, It is an oxymoron and a portmanteau of "friend" and "enemy" that refers to "a person with whom one is friendly, despite a fundamental dislike or rivalry" or "a person who combines the characteristics of a friend and an enemy". A frenemy

is defined as “someone who is both friend and enemy, a relationship that is either mutually beneficial or interdependent while being competitive, fraught with risk and mistrust.” Someone who is bent on making themselves look good at your expense. It typically stems out of jealousy. It can be extremely frustrating and hurtful to be on the receiving end of such a “friendship.”

Here it is right to mention about Ambivalent relationships. Ambivalent relationships are those which involve both positive and negative feelings for someone where a person experiences uncertainty or indecisiveness. Most of the research conducted about work place relationships have focused on either positive, high-quality relationships or on the other end of the spectrum — enemies or negative relationships. And the findings are as expected: positive relationships have positive outcomes and negative relationships, negative outcomes. So what about ambivalent relationships? The research has proved that like negative relationships, ambivalent relationships would have mostly damaging effects. From this angle, frenemies are problematic.

Objectives of the study

1. To introduce the concept of frenemies
2. To identify the types of frenemies
3. To suggest tactics to manage them.

Research Methodology- This is purely a qualitative research and data is collected through secondary sources. The information was collected to enhance the research content from the internet, academic journals, face book feeds as well as some personal blogs.

Review of Literature

Benjamin L. Davis (2016), in his dissertation on “Relational uncertainty between frenemies in forensics” proposes that various contextual factors surrounding forensics competition may influence the communication between friends who compete against each other on the circuit (“frenemies”). Specifically, this study uses the lens of relational uncertainty to determine the significance and communicative behaviors of frenemies when faced with uncertainty-increasing events. Quantitative survey data were collected from 93 participants, in which they were instructed to complete various sets of scales related to team culture, the types of uncertainty, uncertainty reducing strategies, and other relational variables. It was revealed that because of the conflicting roles of friend and competitor, frenemy relationships are likely to be troubled by risky, uncertainty-increasing events. Where it is found that individuals who experience uncertainty in a relationship are essentially given the opportunity to use the experience as a way to learn about and manage their relationship. Sandy.D in her study (2015) “Partnering with the Frenemy A Framework for Managing Business Relationships, Minimizing Conflict, and Achieving Partnership Success” found about the robust phenomenon that refers to as “frenemization.” This is simply the tendency for partners who are initially non-competitive friends to become enemies over time. Frenemies are persons or groups that are outwardly friendly because the relationship brings benefits, but harbour feelings of resentment or rivalry. Why and how frenemies arise in partnering relationships is the subject of this book.

In a 2006 study psychologists Meliksah Demir and Lesley Weitekamp, of Wayne State University, administered questionnaires to 423 college students about their personality, their happiness level, and the quality and number of their friendships. The researchers defined quality friendships as those scoring high on help, intimacy, self-validation, reliable alliance, emotional security and stimulating companionship. Fifty-eight percent of the variance in happiness could be attributed to the quality of a person's friendships, compared with fifty five percent for personality. The number of friends, on the other hand, had no significant effect on how happy a subject was. Duffy, M.K., Ganster, D.C., and Pagon, M (2002)., in their work about "Social Undermining in the Workplace", studied that when employees experience envy they are much more likely to engage in undermining behaviors; this will occur so long as they do not identify strongly with the colleague they envy and are not prevented by strong organizational norms discouraging undermining.

There is a relative lack of attention in the literature regarding the types of frenemies at workplace, however its significance should not be misconstrued. In fact, because of their ability to influence the quality of workplace relationships, frenemies must be considered as an important part of social relationships at work and therefore, has relevance to workplace relationships.

Dealing with Frenemies

Most of us have encountered a frenemy or two at some point. One cannot be a frenemy without being enough of a devotee to own access to the person you would like to back-stab. A frenemy will get close enough to you to seek out your weak spots and identify how vulnerable you are.

These workplace "frenemies" are available in many guises, so be awake to the hazards lurking beneath some warm or appealing demeanors. Many frenemies mean no harm, while others are workplace bullies whose power plays must be checked, according to Donna Flagg, the author of *Surviving Dreaded Conversations: How to Talk through Any Difficult Situation at Work*.

To help you identify workplace frenemies, the foremost visible types as mentioned by Robert DiGiacomo in his article "Beware of workplace frenemies". The author also suggested some solutions for managing them:

1.The Politician

The Politician spends plenty of time trumpeting his accomplishments to superiors, and most of them can be yours according to Blaine Loomer, the author of *Corporate Bullshit: A Survival Guide*. You need to make sure you do not allow their grandstanding upstage your contributions.

The Politician are going to be seen within the office of the superiors more frequently. They will say something to you and another version of the story to your superior, declaring their indispensable worth.

Solution: Keep your manager and other colleagues in email chains, so your work is documented and to avoid the Politician from taking all the credit. If people around you are blowing their own horns, you have got to join the orchestra.

2. The Ambitious Ingénue

The Ambitious Ingénue may be a one who professes nothing but admiration for your work -- but beware. He may have a not-so-secret agenda. Such people always appreciate you, no matter what you do.

Solution: The simplest way to keep an Ambitious Ingénue under control is to be an alert manager. Confirm what is being said to your face matches what is being said (and done) when you are not around. Donna Flagg says that you simply tell them, 'I understand you're gunning for a higher-level job, but putting in place a reputation that you are scheming or disingenuous or cutthroat is not the best way to act,'"

3.TheFuneralDirector

The Funeral Director lives for crises and accentuates the negative of each situation. It is only too easy to affix her in a self-perpetuating complaint-fest. And this negativity may be a career killer.

Solution: Loomer says that if you regularly end up in lengthy conversations about how terrible things are (and how they'll never change), resolve to specialize on making positive changes instead. Challenge yourself and the Funeral Director to develop solutions for problems, instead simplylamentingthem,

4.The Concept Thief

The Concept Thief captures your great idea from a public brainstorming session or other meeting, and passes it off as his own.

Solution: After a protracted meeting, it is sometimes hard to recollect who said what, that gives the Concept Thief the advantage of the doubt. You need to discuss whether there was a misunderstanding about who should get the credit. Flagg says that "If the person acts snarky and immature, then you head to your supervisor, but you let the person know you're doing it"

5.TheTimeWaster

The Time Waster lurks by the proverbial device, or parks in your cubicle, to talk about every possible topic -- except the work at hand. And given the selection between analyzing profit-and-loss statements and talking about what is up on your favorite reality show, it is pretty easy to settle on the latter.

Solution: Socializing with colleagues may be good for your career -- moderately. Allowing yourself a couple of 10-minute chitchat breaks during a day is in fact allowable. Beyond that,

you want to train yourself to mention something like "I know we're both busy, so it's time to get back to work."

6.TheWakeboarder

The Wakeboarder uses charm to shift their responsibilities on others. They make others feel that getting their work done should be their top priority.

Solution: After you feel like you are being taken advantage of, make sure to communicate duties and deadlines clearly. If you have to take the matter to a manager, keep your comments focused on the work – avoid making it personal.

7.TheSurfer

This frenemy uses charm to get her work done by transferring her own responsibilities onto colleagues.

Solution: Chalk out your personal duties and deadlines to avoid being taken advantage of.

8.TheEagerUpstart

The eager upstart is ambitious young newbie who does not stop raving about your productivity and work ethics, but has a hidden agenda. By every means they try to take over your position through scheming.

Solution: It is good to hear appreciations but do not get swayed by the compliments. Remind your subordinate that your take on her performance counts.

9.ThePessimist

They thrive on negativity. They draw you into conversations about how everything about your workplace is terrible.

Solution: After you end up being pulled into complaint mode, focus on the positive steps you can take to resolve problems.

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud, founding father of psychoanalysis rightly said “He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore.”

There are several deleterious effects of frenemies at work place, which has a direct impact on the well-being of the individual. There is an old adage "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer" . Identifying and managing frenemies before they plot against you becomes imperative. The best advice is choose your friends cautiously.

Reference:

1. Armour, S. (2007, August 2). *Friendship and work: A good or bad partnership?* Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-08-01-work-friends_n.htm
2. Duffy, M.K., Ganster, D.C., and Pagon, M., *Social Undermining in the Workplace*. The Academy of Management Journal, 2002. 45(2): p. 331-351.
3. Davis, Benjamin. Northern , *Relational Uncertainty Between Frenemies In Forensics*, masters work, Northern Illinois University Dekalb, Illinois, May 2016, ProQuest Number: 10123524
4. Demir, M., Özdemir, M. & Weitekamp, L.A. Looking to happy tomorrows with friends: Best and close friendships as they predict happiness. *J Happiness Stud* 8, 243–271 (2007).
5. Flag, Donna. (2010). *Surviving dreaded conversations*. The McGraw-Hill companies
6. Jap, Sandy. *Partnering with the Frenemy*, Paul Boger, 2015.print
7. Lewis, K. R. (2012, April 24). *Want a promotion? Make friends at work*. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2012/04/24/want-a-promotion-make-friends-at-work/>
8. Loomer, Blaine. (2009). *Corporate Bullshit A Survival Guide*. Mitchell Publishers
9. McKee, A., & Walker, T. (2014). *Report: State of Friendship*. Retrieved from <http://getlifeboat.com/goodies/report2013/>.
10. Riordan, C. (2013, July 3). *We All Need Friends at Work*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/07/we-all-need-friends-at-work/>
11. Weir, K. (2011, April 14). *Fickle Friends: How to Deal with Frenemies*. Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fickle-friends/>.

Webliography

- <http://www.forbes.com/sites/lizryan/2016/02/11/how-to-handle-a-frenemy-at-work/#f27623c2d095>
- <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/beware-of-workplace-frenemies-hot-jobs>
- <https://www.payscale.com/career-news/2013/10/how-to-deal-with-office-frenemies>
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/work/How-to-deal-with-frenemies-at-work/articleshows/31273354.cms>
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/work/Frenemies-at-work-too/articleshows/7099086.cms>
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/love-sex/Conquer-your-male-frenemies/articleshows/10754647.cms>
- <https://exclusive-executive-resumes.com/how-to-deal-with-an-office-frenemy/>
- <http://magentix.ca/how-to-deal-with-a-frenemy-at-work/>
- https://www.huffpost.com/entry/4-ways-to-handle-workplace-frenemies_b_5627414
- <https://hbr.org/2015/01/research-love-hate-relationships-at-work-might-be-good-for-you>
- <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fickle-friends/>
- <https://dareesinsights.wordpress.com/2010/03/23/frenemies-no-more/>
- <https://www.roberthalf.com.au/blog/jobseekers/3-signs-your-work-buddy-could-become-frenemy>
- <https://toughnickel.com/business/Frenemy-In-the-Workplace-5-Warning-Signs>
- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/frenemy>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/frenemy>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/growing-friendships/201404/frenemies>
- <https://www.rutgers.edu/news/frenemies-how-ambivalent-relationships-affect-us-job>
- <http://ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com/images/9780134386355/samplepages/9780134386355.pdf>
- <http://turkishpolicy.com/Files/ArticlePDF/turkey-and-iran-the-best-of-frenemies-spring-2015-en.pdf>