UMD’s Thriving Workplace Initiative hosted open-invitation Campus Conversations (live and virtual) on the importance of teamwork. We saw the largest turnout so far this year. The Thriving Workplace Survey gauges the strength and unity of a team using three metrics: at work, my opinions seem to count (Q07); my associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work (Q09); and I have a best friend at work (Q10).

Almost 200 ideas were generated during the Campus Conversation through small group conversations and individual reflection. Pieced together, they offer a clear message: the collaboration and collegiality of teamwork stand as one of the most important indicators of a thriving workplace, directly contributing to other TWI metrics, such as respect and alignment to purpose. In other words, teamwork makes the dream work. Below we drill down into the different metrics of teamwork and share what you said.

RECOGNIZE OPINIONS:
Creating an atmosphere where employees can share their opinions is important; ensuring they feel they are being heard is essential. How can supervisors create a workplace where employees can share without judgment and feel their opinions matter? Here were some of your thoughts:

- Ask, “what’s your opinion?” It’s simple and it works.
- Incorporate brainstorming sessions into team meetings—have fun with it. Follow the philosophy that “there are no bad ideas.”
- Increase inclusivity. Find examples or ways that everyone can contribute to the team.
- Not every decision has to be top down—when you can, include others in your decision making to increase buy-in.
- Listen. Listen again. Listen harder. Show an interest in hearing what others think and feel. Follow up with questions or affirmation to show that the message has been received.
- Be open to completing tasks in new or different ways.
DELEGATE!

Few things say, “I trust your opinion” as much as project ownership.

- Be multi-generational! Have ideas for how to interact and communicate with different generations. For instance, younger employees may be accustomed to communicating through text, while others may not. When in doubt, ask.
- Don’t buy tools, equipment, or supplies without first talking to the person who will be using them.
- During team meetings, create time in the agenda for staff to share, and develop a process to ensure that they participate willingly—no forced participation.
- When teamwork is observed, say “thank you.”
- Seek feedback from your team on how they define “teamwork.” Use those answers as a roadmap to fortify your team.
- Connect ideas to people’s strengths.
- Acknowledge all ideas—if it’s implemented, give them credit! If it’s not, explain why.
- Admit when you don’t understand.

What can the University do?

- Ensure that every person has the opportunity for feedback to a supervisor and that they know who their supervisor is, particularly for short-term positions.
- Offer more campus-wide, accessible, short-term talks, such as these Campus Conversations. They are a great way to meet people across campus!
- Create a platform that allows for the exchange of ideas and processes to foster cross-sharing and collaboration.
- Set an expectation from the top about the importance of community input. This fosters a sense of connection to the University.
- Institute mandatory (or almost-mandatory) training for all supervisors.
- Ensure EVERYONE has dedicated time to attend events throughout the year such as these conversations.
- Appreciate and encourage people; help them feel part of something larger.
- Articulate shared goals to help teams align to work together.
- Make seeking help feel less risky.
- More energy and input must go into exploring how we all contribute and serve our enterprise and celebrate those efforts.

QUALITY IS JOB ONE:

Quality work takes place when employees feel their work matters, when they feel challenged and supported, and when accomplishments are noticed and celebrated. Here are some ways you can foster a quality-driven workplace:

FEARLESS IDEAS   THRIVING WORKPLACE INITIATIVE
• Celebrate successes. Consider highlighting an “employee of the month” for good work. It doesn’t require a major prize; even a simple e-mail to the team can celebrate a job well done.
• Create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable asking for help.
• Forgive failures—it encourages innovation.
• Assign tasks based on people’s strengths.
• Allow autonomy; it signals that you are confident they can get the job done right and contribute an element to the bigger picture.
• Promote and encourage opportunities for growth.
• Get your people in front of different campus groups. If you are asked to join a finance task force, send your finance person in your place! Allow them an opportunity to make new connections and have a chance to shine.
• Create opportunities for people to contribute in different ways.
• Provide a good balance of challenge and support.
• Articulate how people and their work fit into the bigger picture.
• Give up some control and trust your team.
• Recognize individuals who promote teamwork and contribute to a stronger sense of team.

Provide analysis without blame.
Allow reflection followed by action.

• Give your employees the information they need, then get out of the way.
• Make sure you have a quality onboarding process for all employees. Do they know how to do tactical things like fill out a timesheet? And, do they know conceptual things like the values, vision, mission, and culture of their new department? Onboarding is one of the most critical tools for initial job success.

What can the University do?

• Make information easy to find on the website. No one should have to do an internet search to find information.
• Re-institute ways of recognizing people and encourage all departments and units to have celebrations/recognition events.
• Consider sabbaticals for staff to engage in development.
• New initiatives and procedures should be communicated far and wide. System-wide communications must be more robust.
• Offer campus-wide recognition of contributions by teams. Just as the campus recognizes and awards individuals, provide a method to recognize teams.
• Create a metric within the PRD process that accounts for attending sessions on teamwork, cooperation, and other thriving workplace topics. Make it even better by having people articulate their learning and the positive outcomes from this development.

• Make a commitment to use a workday to get outside of a “work” day and do something that builds cohesion in the team.

• Institute more mechanisms: for people to learn what others are doing and what are best practices for cross-collaborations, for more community outreach, for communicating information, and to highlight teamwork.

• Encourage telecommuting opportunities to reduce the stress of commuting, when appropriate—create “buy-in” with departments/schools.

• Create a sense of shared governance. Communicate Senate activities more broadly and create a channel for the community to offer feedback.

• Recognize “ALL” that we do—not just teaching.

• Promote a culture that aims for creativity and learning from mistakes. Make it safe to make mistakes; don’t let a quest for perfection get in the way of progress.

• Institute an expectation for collaboration and reward it. Offer an incentive to break down silos and achieve bigger picture work.

• Enhance common technology for staff to seek and navigate connections across departments.

• Create a “who to call” directory that is accessible and transparent.

• Offer a personal development day for staff.

**ENCOURAGE CAMARADERIE:**

When you think “best friend at work,” put it in the context of what best friends offer: support, collaboration, a listening ear, encouragement. **How can supervisors create an environment that fosters those relationships?** Here’s what you said:

• Foster positive relationships; tune in to conversations and connections among staff and be aware of negative relationships.

• Take a holistic approach to staff development by going above work goals. Outline personal ones as well.

• Make room—and create opportunity—for laughter at work.

• Work hard, play hard. Create various social opportunities for staff to connect. Ideas include potlucks, staff snack times, monthly coffees or office parties. Make occasional social events a priority.

• Model self-care and insist on it with your team. Encourage healthy and flexible work-life integration.

• Convey that you care about the person and not just about the work.

• Don’t underestimate the power of small gestures. Whether its sharing an article with a colleague or ordering a second cup of coffee for the person staffing the front desk, small overtures can make a big difference.

• Make time and space to get to know people with whom you don’t ordinarily work.
• Celebrate personal and professional successes.
• Treat people like people. Say please and thank you.
• Don’t expect or require people to be at their desk 24/7. Allow a certain amount of leeway when possible to encourage employees to interact face-to-face.
• Encourage knowledge-sharing.
• If you are a supervisor, consider opening your home for a gathering where people can relax and get to know each other.
• Make sure everyone knows each other and what each person does, both on the team and close stakeholders. Make introductions.

What can the University do?

• Make a big campus feel small. Look for ways to connect the campus—create structures to increase the understanding of what different entities do and engage our constituents.
• Examine the dynamic between faculty and staff and look for ways to improve it. Understand the requirements for each group may be different.
• Shift from the silo mindset, in both actions and language.
• Offer more opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration and learning by classification, such as the administrative professionals conference.
• Emphasize teamwork metrics to downplay competitiveness.
• Create places where the community can come together that feel different from the office or workplace.
• Develop a mentorship program for managers.
• Top leadership should be out getting their hands dirty; they should make every effort to participate in teamwork development, Campus Conversations, etc.
• Build out more activities that create togetherness, such as brown bag lunches, inter/intra department campus meet and greets, community potlucks, etc.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join members of the campus community at upcoming Campus Conversations to discuss dimensions of a thriving workplace and generate strategies for action. Click here for the 2018-2019 schedule.

Need more ideas? Have a specific challenge?
Visit the TWI Resource Library for videos, strategies, and more.

ter.ps/twilibrary