

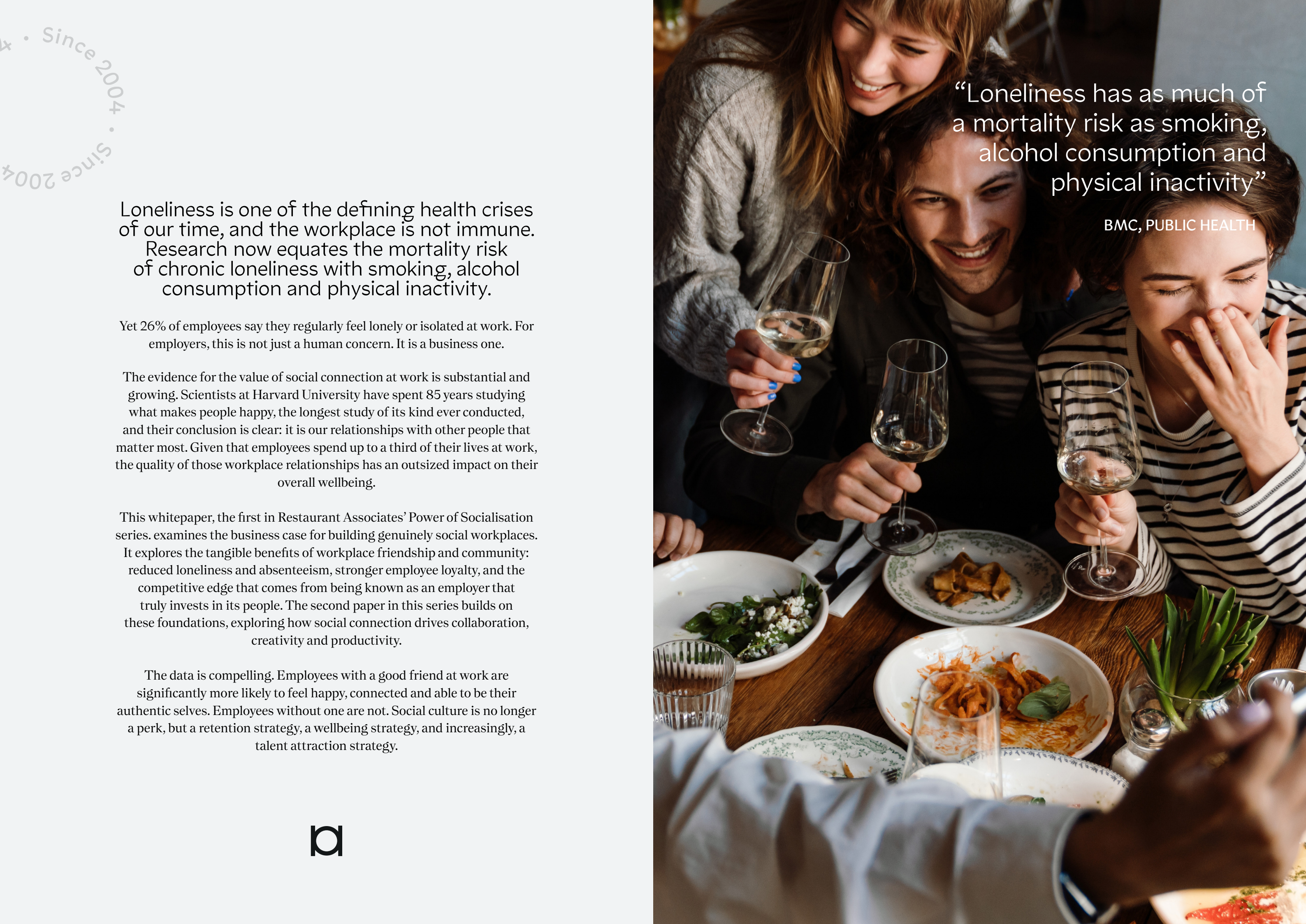
RESTAURANT ASSOCIATES



The Power of Socialisation

WHITEPAPER 1 - THE BENEFITS OF A SOCIAL WORKPLACE





Since 2004

Loneliness is one of the defining health crises of our time, and the workplace is not immune. Research now equates the mortality risk of chronic loneliness with smoking, alcohol consumption and physical inactivity.

Yet 26% of employees say they regularly feel lonely or isolated at work. For employers, this is not just a human concern. It is a business one.

The evidence for the value of social connection at work is substantial and growing. Scientists at Harvard University have spent 85 years studying what makes people happy, the longest study of its kind ever conducted, and their conclusion is clear: it is our relationships with other people that matter most. Given that employees spend up to a third of their lives at work, the quality of those workplace relationships has an outsized impact on their overall wellbeing.

This whitepaper, the first in Restaurant Associates' Power of Socialisation series, examines the business case for building genuinely social workplaces. It explores the tangible benefits of workplace friendship and community: reduced loneliness and absenteeism, stronger employee loyalty, and the competitive edge that comes from being known as an employer that truly invests in its people. The second paper in this series builds on these foundations, exploring how social connection drives collaboration, creativity and productivity.

The data is compelling. Employees with a good friend at work are significantly more likely to feel happy, connected and able to be their authentic selves. Employees without one are not. Social culture is no longer a perk, but a retention strategy, a wellbeing strategy, and increasingly, a talent attraction strategy.



“Loneliness has as much of a mortality risk as smoking, alcohol consumption and physical inactivity”

BMC, PUBLIC HEALTH



Social Connection

Social connection is essential, not optional. Whilst flexibility in working patterns and hours has become increasingly important, so too has social interaction and a sense of community in the workplace.

Social interaction is critical to overall wellbeing. Numerous research studies over the last 70 years have revealed the profound impact that social connectivity has on mental health, physical health, longevity, cognitive function and quality of life.²

26%

of employees say that they feel lonely or isolated at work³

Combatting Loneliness

Loneliness is not a new issue, however employees are increasingly recognising the importance of connection in the workplace. 78% of global workers agree with the statement that 'having friends at work is beneficial for my wellbeing,' and significantly 78% also agree that 'companies should be implementing programs to support employee wellbeing.' Research has also shown that employees reporting loneliness in the workplace take twice as many sick days as people who feel less lonely.

Friendships at work generate a sense of belonging, increasing employee happiness and job satisfaction, and combat the adverse effects of loneliness. As employees become more concerned about connection, we will see a growing expectation for employers to facilitate more opportunities for them to socialise. In turn, employers will benefit from less absenteeism, reducing the impact on cost and productivity.



Benefits of Workplace Friendships

When employees have friends at work, they feel safe and secure. Safe working environments mean employees are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their views and opinions, helping to build a more collaborative and innovative culture - we will explore this topic in further detail in our next whitepaper.

Friendships also offer peer-to-peer support systems that help employees navigate work related stress and pressure.

This is especially important in environments like education and health care that can be particularly emotionally taxing.

As an employer, you're not just facilitating a connected workforce, you're fostering deep, human connectivity which is highly valued in a world where people understand that loneliness is a reality. This in turn will foster positivity, productivity and advocacy for your company.

	Employees WITH a good friend at work	Employees WITHOUT a good friend at work
 I feel happy at work	75%	42%
 I feel connected to my colleagues	80%	34%
 I feel like I belong at work	79%	42%
 I feel I can be my authentic self	80%	44%



Benefits of a Social Workplace for Employers

Employees at social workplaces are more loyal. To attract and retain high quality employees, companies must ensure that the workforce feels integrated and connected to the company and their peers.

Prospective employees are also seeking out social cultures. Creating a social workplace and effectively communicating this is vital for talent attraction and retention. With loneliness being a global challenge, it's likely that some kind of social workforce accreditation may exist in the future.

Social work cultures also signal to employees that an employer is serious about inclusivity, and with 80% of employees saying they want to work for a company that prioritises diversity, equity and inclusion (source: CBNC), socialisation should be leveraged as a key tool in any D&I strategy.

Employee Loyalty

Employee loyalty is in decline, particularly amongst the younger generations, as priorities are shifting. The pandemic accelerated the wellness movement and the prioritisation of health, and today's employees are focused more on personal growth, work-life balance, and meaningful work over staying with one employer for an extended period of time. People are also increasingly seeking a connection to companies and brands who align with their personal values and beliefs.

With these shifting priorities comes an increase in pressure on employers to sell themselves to employees, demonstrating how working there will positively impact their lifestyle. The reported reduction in loyalty results in higher employee turnover, increased costs, and disruption for employers.

Key Takeaways:

Connectivity and community are critical to human wellbeing, but much of the workforce often feels lonely and lack a sense of belonging.

Having close friends and making connections at work is critical to employee wellbeing. People who have friends at work feel happier, healthier, safer and more supported.

To see the benefits of a connected, positive and inclusive workforce, employers must provide ample opportunity for employees to create and maintain friendships at work.

Employee loyalty is in decline, especially amongst the younger generations who prioritise flexibility, personal development and wellbeing over longevity with one employer.

There is increasing pressure on employers to sell themselves as an employer of choice and social culture is key to this. Not only does it signal commitment to employee wellbeing, it indicates an employer is serious about inclusivity and development opportunities.

Want to know more about how to create these moments of socialisation? Stayed tuned for the next whitepapers in our series which delve deeper into how to spark connection, cultivate happiness, improve wellbeing and increase productivity in the workplace.

data published by HR review shows employee turnover rates have increased by 9% since 2019

9%

38% of employees say they feel less loyal to their employer now than they did pre pandemic, rising to 51% of Gen Z

38%

¹ Compass Group Australia, Global Eating at Work Survey, 2023

² Harvard Health Publishing and Blue Zone Reports

³ Compass Group PLC, The Power of Socialisation (all subsequent statistic are from this report unless indicated)



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COMING UP NEXT IN OUR WHITEPAPER SERIES:

How socialisation drives engagement and creativity, and the direct impact this has on productivity.