

Hybrid working: How to recreate watercooler moments over video call

For many workers, the informality of the 'watercooler' chat was the common connection point for the office environment - but as more companies adopt hybrid work, how do we make meaningful connections when our colleagues are just images on a screen?



Image source: Matilda Wormwood from [Pexels](#)

“We have to ask what happens when a good chunk of the workforce isn't anywhere near a watercooler or a break room,” said Linda Trim, Director at Giant Leap, one of South Africa’s largest workplace design consultancies.

“What happens to laughs, gossip, innovation and creativity in the absence of a workplace?”

“Think about all the relationships in your life that stemmed from work. Now think about how many of those relationships formed in person. It underlines the importance of developing relationships at work and just how much we lose when we try to do that without sharing the same physical space.”



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Trim said companies now need to take particular care in fostering employee relationships when everyone is scattered to the four winds.

“The assumption is that proximity equals connection. But it really doesn’t. You can be in an office next to someone and really have zero relationship with them or only interact on messaging services anyway.

“When you make a connection a priority, you really have to create space for people to show up in authentic and vulnerable way. And that really starts at the top. For effective managers, that means letting people know when they have had a hard day and talking about their lives outside of work.”

Trim added this gives permission to everyone in the offices - and particularly in teams - for managers to show up in a way that’s the basis for true connection at work, whether in an office or on a video call.



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“That doesn’t mean you have to give everyone your life story,” Trim noted.

“You can choose what level of vulnerability you want to have with colleagues, but it does prompt you into a space of sharing your history, your background and the big things going on in your life. In short, it is sharing all that you’re bringing to the workspace.”

Trim said that the idea that you can check your life at the office door if your are working in the office of literally at the door or virtually at the door is a false notion.

“Whether you’re in person or you’re online, it’s really about how people show up in a way that is authentic,” Trim concluded.

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