

You may have insurance, doctors, and diets to ensure your physical wellness, but do you have a plan or supports to ensure your 'social wellness,' your ability to interact with and get support from the people around you? This month, we sat down with Shaun Doyle, a local expert on customer service and relationship building, to talk about the importance of social wellness and why it is every bit as important as physical wellness, especially when it comes to your happiness and success.

"Just Another Version of You"

In our news and social networks, we are often reminded how different we are from other people. As you've scrolled through your feed, maybe you've chanced upon a 'friend's' update and thought to yourself:

"Her background is so different than mine."

"He obviously has more money than me."

"We are so different politically."

And there's nothing wrong with this. An integral part of understanding who you are is understanding how you are different and unique from others. In fact, identifying differences has an important place in our society: it helps us understand inequality and injustice, and it allows different identities and cultures to flourish alongside each other.

But feeling different all the time can be lonely and unconstructive—understanding how we are similar is just as important to our individual and cultural wellbeing. "When writer/producer Norman Lear was asked, if he had a bumper sticker, what would it be, he answered 'Just another version of you.' That message has really stuck with me," Doyle says. "When people only see how they differ from others, they blind themselves to the connections that they might share, not just as human beings but as people who likely have shared qualities or experiences."

When you take a moment to sit down with someone different than yourself, you'll find that you likely have something in common. "It could be something simple, like a shared interest

in music or sports, but from that simple commonality might begin a deeper conversation or, at minimum, a good learning experience. Being open to new relationship can open you up to new experiences and ways of thinking—and new friends."

Social Networks at Work

Your social wellness doesn't just depend on your relationships with family and friends—it also factors in your relationships with colleagues. "You spend a lot of time at work," Doyle reminds us, "so you'll be a lot happier and more comfortable if you honestly reach out to your colleagues and try to create connections or bridge gaps in understanding."

A strong social network at work can also help you be a better employee. When Shaun's working on a project and needs an outside perspective, he knows who he can turn to: "I know I have people who can mentor me and give their opinions—and I can do the same for them. It's a win-win situation."

I Need You, You Need Me

Once you have a relationship with someone, it is up to you to keep that relationship meaningful and strong. "It's easy to get caught up in the day to day and prioritize work and family—everyone has been there," Shaun admits, "but at the end of the day, your social network depends on you, and you depend on them. If you aren't there for them, you may find yourself feeling alone and unsupported when you need help the most."

Oftentimes, when people are experiencing feelings of anxiety or depression, they may turn inward and withdraw from social relationships. In fact, if you are experiencing these feelings, this is when you need social supports the most. Healthy social supports provide a great opportunity to combat feelings of anxiety, isolation, and sadness. They can give different perspectives, help you re-ground to your strengths, and increase feelings of wellbeing. **If you find yourself wanting to develop your social wellness and work on some short term strategies to help increase an overall feeling of wellbeing, you can reach out to your EAP to schedule a counseling session with one of our EAP Clinicians.**

