

## Are You a Workplace Outsider?

Social psychologist Abraham Maslow observed many years ago that friendship and validation by others is more than a mere desire – it’s actually an important need. Having friends contributes significantly to our sense of self esteem and wellbeing. But as many of us first discovered in grade school, being even a little bit “different” can diminish our acceptance and trigger little acts of disdain. “They are often small events that are hard to prove, like gestures, words, treatment and tone of voice,” according to management consultant Natalie Holder-Winfield. “They may not even be intentional but they stem from an inherent bias against someone perceived as different. And they can be very hurtful.”

But according to career blog site **Jobacle.com**, there are proven ways to develop genuine relationships at work without compromising one’s unique interests, values or culture.

- **Be yourself.** It’s never advisable to pretend to be someone who you aren’t. Friendships based on a false persona will never be genuine, satisfying or sustainable.
- **Celebrate your individuality:** Despite society’s embrace of diversity, many workers sense a detachment from “the group” because they are in some way *different*. Realize that your uniqueness defines you and make an effort to reach out to co-workers without compromising your individuality. If they can’t accept you, that’s really their problem, not yours!
- **Maintain good humor:** Sure, being rejected can really hurt. But it’s not an excuse to hide in one’s personal silo. Remain approachable.



- **Be approachable:** Avoiding eye contact and detaching from others telegraphs an unmistakable message that one is not “available” to co-workers. Simple smiles and friendly words will greatly accelerate the development of positive relationships.
- **Be a team player:** A sure way of gaining respect in any work group is to be accountable, productive and cooperative. In spite of personality, lifestyle or cultural differences, co-workers will respect a hard worker!
- **Take the high road:** Sometimes the workforce becomes divided into various cliques. Affiliating with a particular clique may seem an easy way to achieve acceptance. But remaining a “free agent” who tries to get along with everyone is the best way to foster relationships with a broad spectrum of co-workers. Steering clear of cliques also eliminates toxic workplace politics, rivalries and drama.

Remember that professional EAP counselors are available to discuss your particular situation and help you generate ideas to foster positive relationships at work. Simply dial the toll free number below to start a dialogue.