This year for the first time, the group met in Stark County at the Hilton Doubletree. Class members were impressed with the amenities as it provided a great space for the retreat.

Beyond the normal team building and networking that is expected to build strong group dynamics, the class also learned of Canton’s past from John Werren, discovered their personal strengths through a certified Gallup training and how to utilize them to their fullest potential. Understanding the demographics of our community are also important when serving on a board, so time was spent understanding community needs through demographics. Additional time was devoted to the topic of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity facilitated by 35th class member Krista Allison which will continue throughout the year.

A strong foundation of knowledge, friendships and trust began during this retreat for these individuals which they will use as they work together in this next year and beyond.

Here are a few thoughts from our class members about the opening retreat …

“I am excited to be part of the 36th Class of the Leadership Stark County Signature Program. The retreat served as a great overview of the learning opportunities I will experience throughout the coming year. I appreciated the time devoted to better understanding my own strengths and their impact on me as a leader. I also enjoyed working with my classmates and getting to know them professionally and personally. I am already eager to meet back with the group next month to learn more about our wonderful community and the many resources available to the residents of Stark County.” – Dan Lowmiller

“As a newer leader in Stark County, I was excited to be selected to be a part of the Signature program, but unsure of what to expect, as throughout my career, I have been involved in many different leadership training opportunities. From entering the retreat and over the two days, it is already obvious this is going to be something very special. I found myself thinking differently as I learned about my strengths and the strengths of my peers, all while also discovering things about Stark County that I never knew. I also connected with others in my class far faster than I would have imagined and found myself being transparent and leaning on others for advice and clarity. It is clear this is going to be an experience that is going to affect me positively professionally and personally, and I can’t wait to continue to grow and learn as we proceed through this program and process! – Julie Abiecunas

(continued on page 13)
Are you looking to serve the Stark County community, while also being part of its rich culture and history? Then look no further than the Canton Palace Theatre!

VOLUNTEER
As a small arts organization with a full calendar of events, the Canton Palace Theatre relies on volunteers. Our dedicated team of volunteers serve as event support staff in the concession stand, bar, Box Office, and more. And as an added bonus, you get to attend events for free!
Visit www.cantonpalacetheatre.org/volunteer

LEAD
Take your volunteer service a step further by joining the theatre’s Board of Directors. Board members guide the organization while planning for its future success and sustainability. Applications for the Board of Directors are accepted year-round.
Email Georgia@cantonpalacetheatre.org

SUPPORT
In addition to being tax-deductible, financial support in the form of memberships or donations provides necessary funds to further the Canton Palace Theatre’s mission of maintaining the architectural integrity of its historic Theatre and partnering with others to present cultural, entertainment, and educational experiences for the community.
Visit www.cantonpalacetheatre.org/membership

605 Market Ave. N, Canton OH 44702
Ph: 330.454.8172
On September 19, we kicked off the 2022-2023 Youth Leadership Academy Year! We welcomed 37 sophomores, representing 17 Stark County school districts and St. Thomas Aquinas, at the Youth Leadership Academy Opening Retreat, held at Sippo Lake Park’s Exploration Gateway.

Students learned more about what Youth Leadership Academy is and got to know each other in preparation for three years spent together. They wrote in journals as a means of self-reflection and meditation, played games to lighten up and have some fun, and learned about leadership in different forms. Through their experiences together and through the messages they were told by our speakers, the students learned what their future in YLA holds. They also shared with us some of their insights on leadership:

*It takes only one person to change someone's life and become a leader. To be a leader is to be kind. A good leader should be an inclusive one.*

As with all of our classes, our new students have already shown us how invaluable their wisdom, curiosity, and joy are as we tap into them as rising leaders in our community. We cannot wait to see their leadership journeys continue!
Stark County TASC, Inc. is a private, non-profit behavioral health agency that accepts referrals from all phases of the justice system and the community. Our counselors provide assessment, counseling and case management services to those who struggle with alcohol, drug abuse and mental health issues, linking and assisting them with the services they need to improve their situation both with the justice system and in their daily lives.

Our team strives to find innovative ways to reach those we are committed to help, so that they may break the cycle and live a more fulfilling and healthier life.

www.starktasc.org

For more information call: 330-479-1912
Our generation has been one full of monumental events. September 11, the Great Recession, and the first black President are just a few significant events that impacted the start of our professional lives. As young professionals today, it seems every couple of months we experience yet another need for pivoting. A global pandemic, a mental health and addiction crisis, and an ongoing civil unrest, just to name a few.

The inaugural YoungPro Conference was to originally take place in the spring of 2020. As we all know, the universe had other plans. The event took place virtually in the fall that year- with a focus on resiliency, connection, and even humor. The second, now annual, event took place in person and grew even larger than the first. We were on to something. Topics once again were relevant to the very specific, unique time for YPs and ranged from access to local CEOs, discussions about the Akron-Canton region, leadership, and the entrepreneurial mindset. The synergy in the room was unmatched and true connection was made. Now a signature event for ystark!, the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce’s young professional initiative, the YoungPro Conference is gearing up for year THREE. This year, as we have done in previous years, the conference will focus on topics at the forefront for YPs today.

I met recently with a colleague and friend of mine, Skyler Parks. Skyler is a Board member for Leadership Stark County and is the Director of Business Development and Growth for the Stark County Minority Business Association. Skyler and I find ourselves at the same “table” quite often. Most recently, we were both called to the table to discuss equity and inclusion in programming. In addition to him expressing his views as a person of color, he mentioned how he often has a similar feeling of inequity as a younger leader in the community. THAT further reinforced the importance of an event like the YoungPro Conference.

The 2022 event will once again kick off with CEO Meet & Eat roundtable discussions, but this year the local leaders have been intentionally chosen from the Stark County Community Moving Forward group. This group is comprised of local C-level professionals with the mission of advancing minorities and minority-owned businesses within the business community. Some of these leaders are minorities themselves, and some are not- but all have a shared desire to make Stark County a more equitable place to live, work, and play. The connections and discussions are sure to be both powerful and impactful.

We cant wait for the YoungPro 3.0 Conference and if you are a young professional age 20-40 looking to experience a half-day of personal and professional development, addressing the unique needs of YPs at this moment in time. We hope you will join us.

YoungPro 3.0 Conference
Friday, Oct. 21; 12-4:30pm
Exploration Gateway at Sippo Lake Park
Register at www.cantonchamber.org/ystark-youngpro

Skyler Parks, Director of Business Development and Growth, Stark Minority Business Association
Kelly Piero, Director of Marketing, Comm., & Public Affairs, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce
American Red Cross volunteers support our community every day. They help families after a disaster, support military members, veterans and their families, transport life saving blood and assist donors at blood drives.

Visit redcross.org/volunteer, or call 216-431-3328 to learn more about becoming a Red Cross volunteer.
LEADERSHIP STARK COUNTY

JOB & OPPORTUNITIES BOARD

By Kristina Belliveau, Assistant Director, Leadership Stark County

Looking for a job, volunteer, or Board opportunity can be overwhelming and very time consuming. Recently Leadership Stark County created a new Job & Opportunities Board, which allows organizations to post free listings and Alumni to find various opportunities all in one space. This is a great place to look if you would like to find a new job or get involved in our community with board service or volunteerism.

All job postings on our site require a wage or salary range. This supports wage transparency, which helps close the wage gap for women and minorities. With the increasing number of U.S states and cities that require salary disclosures, including Toledo, Ohio, this is a practice that will likely become common practice. Additionally, when we surveyed the Stark County workforce, we found that 75% of candidates where less likely, and 12% would not apply at all, if the salary range was not included in the job posting.

Do you have a job, volunteer, or Board opening that you would like to share with our incredible Alumni? Visit https://leadershipstarkcounty.org/jobs-opportunities/post-a-job/ to start your FREE post!

BOOK REVIEW

THINK AGAIN: THE POWER OF KNOWING WHAT YOU DON’T KNOW

Don’t you love it when someone gives you a great book to read? I know I do along with TV Shows, Podcasts, and music. So, we thought, who better than our amazing group of Alumni to suggest their favorites.

Our newest addition to the Leadership Link will feature an alumnus who will share their favorite. This month, Angela Palomba, reviews “Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know” by Adam Grant.

I recently listened to the audiobook, “Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know” by Adam Grant. “Think Again” talks about the importance of taking another look and possibly relearning ways of thinking as individuals and society.

Taking another approach to a situation is essential to growth and Grant does a great job of sharing ways to do so and the importance of rethinking. He talks about how we adjust other areas of our lives as we grow but not always our thought process. Just because we learned a set of beliefs early on doesn’t mean that is still relevant today.

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One important takeaway from this book was the understanding of stereotypes and how we need to rethink those beliefs. Some of the examples that he used to get his point across were more serious in nature (discussing vaccines) and some were lighter (talking about Yankees and Red Sox fans getting along). Both were great illustrations showing the importance of being open to rethinking.

Overall, I really enjoyed this book and will be checking out more of Adam Grant’s books in the future.

Review by: Angela Palomba (pictured), Executive Director of The First Tee of Canton, is an avid reader and graduate of the 35th Leadership Stark County Signature Class. If you are interested in contributing a book review to LeadershipLink, email Kristina Belliveau at kristinab@leadershipstarkcounty.org.
EVERYTHING IS COOL WHEN YOU’RE PART OF A TEAM!

By Stephanie Snow Werren, Leadership Stark County Director

When you need to add people to your team, it isn’t always simple. Will they fit in? Will they add to the “culture” you’ve worked towards? Will you be able to keep them engaged? When I jumped on a call with Kristina Wagner-Belliveau a little over a year ago regarding a role with LSC, I knew I needn’t worry any longer.

Kristina has added the spark we needed to take Leadership Stark County to another level. She jumped in with 100% as she does with all projects. As a lifelong learner, she enjoys the process of figuring out things while trying to improve the process at the same time. Her energy is contagious, and we all look forward to seeing her each day. It’s been a busy year full of increasing responsibility, as Kristina has carved out her current role as Assistant Director for Leadership Stark County.

I’ve learned so much from her this year and I know other members of our team have also. She reinvigorated me to think differently, implement new curriculum, expand our reach on social media which lead to record applications in all programs. Leadership has reached a whole new level and I give Kristina much of that credit.

Not to mention, Kristina has also turned out to be an amazing friend! As I often reference in facilitations from Gallup, having a close friend at work can make all the difference. I’ve been very fortunate, as I can truly call many of the women, I work with at the chamber my “best friends”

THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF A BEST FRIEND AT WORK

By Alok Patel and Stephanie Plowman | Gallup

People instinctively want close, trusting relationships -- at work and in life. Having a “best friend” at work contributes to a thriving employee experience and to communication, commitment and other outcomes. In fact, recent Gallup data show that having a best friend at work has become more important since the start of the pandemic, even considering the dramatic increase in remote and hybrid work.

There are several factors behind the rising importance of having a best friend at work. For many employees, the pandemic caused traumatic experiences and other profound difficulties, particularly for healthcare and other front-line workers and educators. These employees found the social and emotional support from their best friends at work to be more critical than ever to get them through these challenging times.

Recent Gallup data show that having a “best friend” at work has become more important since the start of the pandemic, even considering the dramatic increase in remote and hybrid work. Imagine, for example, the working parent who leaned on their best friend at work (who also has a child) when the pandemic required them to juggle at-home learning and their job responsibilities. Their best friend at work offered judgment-free encouragement during the toughest storms -- the kind of support that communicates, “You’re not alone.”

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Other employees who were thrown into the world of remote or hybrid work found that their best friend at work helped keep them informed, accountable and connected to their team. For instance, an employee can ask their best friend at work “dumb” questions about changes to how things get done -- without fear of embarrassment.

And when workloads are heavy, your best friend at work is someone you feel accountable to, someone you don’t want to let down. As a result, you naturally want to go the extra mile for them on a project.

On the other hand, an employee without a best friend at work became that much more isolated during the pandemic. And because they lack collaboration and a sense of responsibility to a best friend at work, their performance may have dipped too.

Whether in the office or the virtual world, a best friend at work is a necessary source of connection and support.

**Having a Best Friend at Work Has an Even Stronger Connection to Outcomes Amid the Pandemic**

Gallup has repeatedly shown that having best friends at work is key to employee engagement and job success. Gallup data indicate that having a best friend at work is strongly linked to business outcomes, including profitability, safety, inventory control and retention.

Employees who have a best friend at work are significantly more likely to:

- engage customers and internal partners
- get more done in less time
- support a safe workplace with fewer accidents and reliability concerns
- innovate and share ideas
- have fun while at work

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Our latest findings show that since the pandemic started, there has been an even stronger relationship between having a best friend at work and important outcomes such as employees’ likelihood to recommend their workplace, their intent to leave and their overall satisfaction with their workplace.

Best friends at work drive outcomes because they’re more than a social connection or good relationship. A best friend at work is someone you can rely on through thick and thin. Someone who has your back and genuinely cares. These authentic friendships deepen employees’ sense of ownership for their work and enable employees to be more effective and sustainable, regardless of where or when they work.

Best friends at work have played a crucial role as workplaces navigate changes, uncertainty and new ways of working. Change is here to stay, and best friends at work can keep one another informed and work together to familiarize themselves with new technologies and processes.

Unfortunately, leaders are facing significant challenges supporting connections and friendships among a physically distant workforce. In the U.S., just two in 10 employees report having a best friend at work.

In Gallup’s experience working with clients, the following strategies can help promote best friends at work for in-person, remote and hybrid workers:

1. **Promote intentionality, starting with leaders.**

   Intentionality starts with leaders who celebrate and champion best friends at work, from the C-suite to front-line managers. Employees learn behavioral norms and cues from their managers and leaders -- and they need the “OK” from leaders to develop friendships on the job. Leaders should talk about the importance of having a best friend at work and exemplify intentionality in forming connections.

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<tr>
<th>Impact of Best Friend at Work on Likelihood to Recommend Their Company as a Great Place to Work Increased Amid Pandemic</th>
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<tr>
<td>I would recommend my organization as a great place to work. (% Strongly agree)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Do not strongly agree)</td>
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<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Strongly agree)</td>
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GALLUP

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<th>Impact of Best Friend at Work on Likelihood to Leave Their Company Increased Amid Pandemic</th>
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<td>To what extent are you currently looking for a different job than the one you have now? (% Watching/Actively looking)</td>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Do not strongly agree)</td>
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<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Strongly agree)</td>
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<th>Impact of Best Friend at Work on Workplace Satisfaction Increased Amid Pandemic</th>
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<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your place of employment as a place to work? (% Extremely satisfied)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Do not strongly agree)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a best friend at work. (% Strongly agree)</td>
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GALLUP
Employees at all levels need to make a concerted effort to get to know their coworkers and maintain friendships. For example, employees should make a habit of having special quick connects, maybe via video chat, to say hello and spark conversation. For hybrid workers, these quick connects might be on an office day, such as a lunch or walking meeting.

Fully remote workers with tighter schedules can reserve five minutes before a team meeting for interaction -- or perhaps schedule a collaborative video chat to work on a shared project together in a virtual setting. Employees should also make a point of asking for feedback and creative support.

The key is making time to connect with colleagues wherever and however they’re working to maintain relationships with best friends or develop friendships with other colleagues. Don’t wait for others to come knocking; look for ways to partner with and support them.

2. Create interactive opportunities for friendships to blossom.

Team structures, workflows, and other systems and practices can make or break employees’ ability to develop real friendships at work. Leaders should assess how factors like performance expectations and time requirements support (or impede) having best friends at work. Do employees have time, opportunities and permission to form spontaneous connections?

Just as important, managers are responsible for promoting a local team atmosphere that encourages trust and collaboration. Wherever possible, managers should remove constraints to socialization and create an atmosphere where employees feel free and encouraged to connect and show support.

Leaders should liberate employees to pursue friendships on their own but also support their efforts with preplanned social events that give employees ample opportunities to chat, whether an off-site event or an impromptu team lunch. Scheduled friendship activities might seem like a waste of time, but this powerful investment helps every employee -- even the most isolated remote workers -- form real friendships.

Managers and leaders can also support connections by making time to talk to employees themselves. For instance, a 15-minute manager-employee conversation might highlight ways to pair team members on new tasks to promote friendships. Frequent conversations can also reveal barriers that preclude friendships at work.

3. Communicate often.

Encouraging consistent conversation and connection is key to cultivating best friends at work. It also fuels performance excellence: Through conversation, employees who are best friends can bring their authentic selves to their work and can support one another, maintain accountability, share ideas and use their strengths to contribute to a superior product.

Communication starts with leaders setting an example -- creating a culture where friendly dialogue is the norm. For instance, managers should send weekly team emails to encourage recognition, celebrate anniversaries and birthdays, and relay what everyone’s working on.

To own their role, employees at all levels should maintain open lines of communication with their colleagues to show support and be available in times of need. When communication is strong, team members who are genuine friends are more likely to reach out when they’re overwhelmed or struggling.

Another great practice when working remotely is to make a point of letting partners know when you’re going to be unavailable or offline -- as well as when your virtual door is “open.” When coworkers are best friends, these habits are second nature rather than having to be managed. Best friends want to stay connected and actively reach out.

Building a Culture of Best Friends at Work

Many successful organizations Gallup has partnered with to create the conditions for best friends at work find success in sharing public stories about their best friend at work. Consistently talking about best friends at work makes relationships part of how we do things around here -- in other words, part of the work culture.

For this client, consistently sharing stories fuels a “best friend” work atmosphere and offers valuable lessons about how others can benefit from having a best friend at work. Since the effort began, the client has experienced dramatic growth in the number of employees who say they have a best friend at work -- improving on this engagement element by over 80 percentile points in Gallup’s global database. The organization is now an employer of choice that has been commended as a Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award winner.

A best friend at work is the gift that keeps on giving. When employees have genuine friends, they have someone who makes them feel included and cared for. Someone they can be vulnerable with. And because they care about their best friend, they don’t want to let them down, so they show up for them in their performance and in a supportive role. They have their back -- whether that means prioritizing safety or going out their way on a project.

This type of support is all the more crucial in the post-pandemic workplace, where many employees are more emotionally taxed and physically distanced. Workers need not only social support, but also accountability and connection to their culture.

Having a best friend at work helps even the most remote worker stay engaged and committed, fueling them to go the extra mile no matter what challenges arise.
“It would be an extreme small statistical percentage of meeting other members of my 36th leadership class in my normal day-to-day life. Through different careers, demographics, interests, and daily routines, I can tell you our paths would not have crossed. Instead, I can tell you after being reluctant (and tired from work) to meet new people and sit in a hotel conference room for 2 days, the connections to my fellow leaders started to take shape. I think slow at first, as it is easy to engage with someone for a few hours, the longer we stayed together the deeper our bonds were. The content of the retreat was a great ice breaker in truly doing what the course was set out to do, which was to interact with others that you wouldn’t normally get the chance too. I can honestly say I am looking forward to seeing my leadership class again soon.” – Michael Koutsis

“The 36th Leadership Stark County retreat was filled with innovative thinkers, great minds and laughs. The two-day retreat was invigorating and just want my mind and soul needed. I can’t wait for more interactions, learning and refreshing people! What a wonderful experience and I’m so thankful I get to engage with captivating people and grow my leadership awareness.” – Sarah Fiddler

KEY DATES:
10/13: Stark County Day
10/18: Financial Legacy Symposium
10/21: YoungPro 3.0 Conference
10/25: Board Matching Event
10/26: Community Salute Awards

SIGNATURE RETREAT PHOTOS...