

## Colleague

A colleague is a fellow worker. He or she is presumably working in the same profession or direction as you—otherwise he might simply be called a fellow employee, with the simple implication that he and you work for the same company. A colleague, to make the definition still sharper—is normally thought of as someone with whom you bond. Here the distinctions are refined. For someone to be my colleague, how closely must I bond with that person? Must such a closeness express itself in language? Do I call my colleague ‘buddy?’ Or is that too intimate? Or archaic? Is language in fact even sensitive enough to use as a metric of tone in personal relations? And for that matter is language too culture-specific to serve our purposes here? Might ‘buddy’ serve me in Detroit, as a name tag to apply to my colleague in sales, while in Lyons I could hunt vainly for the appropriate moniker for my ‘colleague’ Charles, and fumble around among options like ‘mon vieux’ or ‘mon ami Charles.’

Expressing relationships within a given workforce—members of a team, a faculty, a University Department, a police force—is a continually self-reassessing exercise in evaluating and characterizing relationships. ‘Colleague’ lies at one of those purely descriptive intersections where pure classification opens a window onto human feeling, enabling one to add gingerly to the recipe for colleague a pinch of intimacy, a way to say that, between this guy and me there is a bit more than punching the same time clock at the same time. There is, perhaps, some sense of solidarity with the purposes of the company, or at least some sense of mutual satisfaction at the way we sidelined a rival company’s effort to outsell us on that morning’s transaction.