

We Are Family

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2022-01-07

Here is one of the most blatant lies I've heard in my professional career, and sadly, I've heard it at quite a few jobs: "We are a family". For some reason, to compensate for otherwise abysmally dystopian work environments, founders and managers fall into the temptation of telling their staff that they "are like family" to them, or that the whole company "is like one big family".

This is wrong, at (oh so) many levels. It is actually a huge red flag in my book of self-preservation.

Let's say it clearly: your workplace and your family are two different things. As much as you can (and should) enjoy being with great colleagues (and I truly hope you do), your job and your family are two different things.

(Well, unless you work in your own family's "family business", of course; in which case, well, your colleagues have a high probability of *actually being* your family, from a genetically point of view. If that's the case, you might also happen to have shares in said business, or to benefit from it substantially in various ways, which is quite a bonus point, but entirely beyond the scope of this article.)

Most of us don't work in a family business, and most of us don't even own voting shares of the companies where we happen to work. In those cases, work is... work. It is, in essence, just a contractual relationship that binds you to certain obligations in exchange for certain rights, the most visible and widespread of which is, of course, a regular pecuniary salary.

That's it. There's nothing else. And none of the definition above sounds like "family". If it does, well, I'm nobody to judge. The hard truth is: you can be fired from work in case of misconduct, bankruptcy, or simply because they decide so! One day you show up for work, a cup of latte in your hands, and your boss breaks the news that your position has been terminated. Been there, had that.

So much for a family, if you ask me.

Work is a mutually convenient exchange of workforce for cash and other perks. Both parties take out something good from the exchange, and are better off afterwards, so that everybody is happy about doing it; which is why we do it.

We both win something out of this exchange. There might be some added value on top of that: do you get bonuses at the end of the quarter? A company car? Massages? Free food? A foosball table? It is all well and good, but it's not *that* important at the end of the day.

Thing is, the most important parts of work are those that do *not* appear in the job description. Things like the friendliness of the people you work with. The trust they have vested in you and your capacity of decision, and of course in the output of your work. The truth you have for them. The respect everyone has for one another at every single moment they're together. The level of collaboration, solidarity, and support you get from your peers when shit hits the fan.

And I want to stress this last point: you will realize whether you're at the right place (or not) as soon as the first problem appears. Tough situations are the ones that *actually* make everyone show their true nature.

Every single place where I've heard the phrase "we are all family here" from a Michael Scott in charge, was, inexorably, a toxic hornet nest where a few assholes made everyone else feel miserable every single moment of their lives. A place of burnout, people crying in the bathrooms, political fights for infinitesimal quotas of power, discrimination against everyone that is not a thirty year-old white caucasian male, and worse.

And there's one more hidden aspect behind that phrase. Many people in our modern world are physically and emotionally alone; the reasons are various and I won't delve in them; but it's a fact of life. Saying "we are family" is just *speculating* on top of that loneliness, providing a seemingly safe haven in a context that isn't one. It's a way of manipulating people to work uncompensated overtime and to "give it all" in exchange for love. It's a way to create a tribe based on the fear of losing the love of a family that isn't. It's sinister, demeaning, abject, and it happens in a lot of workplaces.

So, if you ever hear the phrase "we are family", follow my advice, and run away for dear life.