

# Workplace Crisis Alert: New Study Uncovers ‘Social Muscle Atrophy’ Costing Organizations Billions

*Poor Communication, Conflict, and Disengagement Are Costing Companies Up to Half a Trillion Dollars Per Year—Here’s How Leaders Can Fix It*

PHILADELPHIA, PA, UNITED STATES, February 19, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A groundbreaking [2025 national study](#) by Henna Pryor and Priority Group, in partnership with The Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK), has uncovered a hidden workplace crisis: employees are avoiding critical conversations, weakening trust, and costing companies billions in lost productivity, disengagement, and turnover.

In a national study of working Americans, nearly 1 in 3 (30%) admitted they’d rather clean a toilet than ask a coworker for help.

While hybrid work, digital dependence, and fast-paced change currently define the workplace, this shocking statistic underscores a growing problem—Social Muscle Atrophy (SMA)—the gradual decline of employees’ ability to communicate, collaborate, and navigate workplace conflict and interactions.

“As companies optimize for speed and efficiency, they’ve neglected social depth—and it’s costing them,” says Henna Pryor, workplace performance expert and author of award-winning book, *Good Awkward*. “Social skills are trainable, but without practice, they deteriorate—leading to fractured teams, stalled innovation, and avoidable turnover. We need to ask ourselves: How can we be as connected socially as we are technologically?”



## THE SHOCKING COSTS OF SOCIAL MUSCLE ATROPHY (SMA)

The pioneering research reveals critical ways SMA is eroding workplace performance:

1. Employees actively avoid asking for help.  
-- 30% would rather clean a toilet than ask a coworker for assistance, exposing deep discomfort and lack of trust.

2. SMA impacts leadership, not just employees.

-- 43% of executives struggle with “false self-sufficiency,” believing they must handle everything alone—significantly more than managers (28%) or employees (27%).

3. Weak social skills are actively driving turnover.



1 in 3 employees would rather scrub a toilet than ask for help. What does that say about today's workplace?"

*Henna Pryor, Workplace Performance Expert*

-- SMA is the #1 organizational challenge tied to turnover. Gen Z workers report 27% more SMA-related struggles than Boomers, signaling a retention crisis.

4. Workers value teamwork—but avoid it.

-- 84% say social skills are critical for navigating change, yet 56% prefer working alone due to discomfort, a habit of avoidance, and lack of trust.

5. Stronger Social Muscle Strength (SMS) = better

leadership & innovation.

-- Older Millennials who actively built Social Muscle Strength (SMS) experienced 14 of 16 positive workplace outcomes significantly more often.

-- Executives prioritizing social strength saw 23% higher leadership effectiveness scores.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Weak communication and collaboration isn't just frustrating—it's wildly expensive:

-- Poor communication costs companies \$62.4 million per year (SHRM), and Pryor's research shows SMA is worsening this problem.

-- 65% of hybrid/remote workers struggle with relationship-building.



Workplace Performance Expert Henna Pryor speaks to leaders about building high-performing teams

-- 44% of employees say their workplace relationships feel "superficial."

If organizations don't take action now, they risk losing engagement, innovation, and ultimately, their competitive edge.

"Leaders can no longer afford to treat social skills as 'soft skills'—they are business-critical," says Pryor.

## HOW COMPANIES CAN TAKE ACTION NOW

The research is clear: companies that ignore Social Muscle Atrophy will see declining engagement, innovation, and retention. The study provides science-backed solutions to reverse SMA and build Social Muscle Strength (SMS) to drive business performance.

"Leaders who take action now—who intentionally design structures that strengthen social muscle across dimensions—will see the greatest long-term gains," says Pryor. "It's not about 'forced fun' or team-building exercises. It's about creating an environment where social strength is a deliberate, daily practice."

The study introduces key steps that organizations can take immediately to combat SMA and unlock stronger, more profitable performance:

### 1. Make Social Skill-Building a Business Strategy—Not Just an HR Initiative

-- Treat workplace connection like a core competency by embedding structured social development into daily operations—through problem-solving frameworks, conflict navigation drills, and cross-team collaboration exercises.

### 2. Design Workplace "Public Spaces" for Organic Connection

-- Move beyond forced social events and design built-in interaction points—like "Unfinished Meetings" that encourage follow-ups, or cross-team "Micro-Disagreement Drills" sessions where teams practice navigating conflict.

### 3. Train Leaders to Be Social Architects, Not Just Decision-Makers

-- Equip leaders to model strong social muscle—by practicing open communication, healthy conflict resolution, and intentionally creating environments to encourage interaction across the spectrum of social dimensions (shallow/deep, wide/narrow).

### 4. Assign "Social Bridgers" to Strengthen Workplace Connection

-- Create designated roles focused on mapping silos, facilitating mentorship, and reinforcing team cohesion—before disengagement and friction escalate into turnover.

## ABOUT HENNA PRYOR AND PRIORITY GROUP

Priority Group is a cutting-edge workplace performance growth firm that blends decades of working with corporate leaders and teams with a fresh, science-based approach to taking more strategic risks and boosting social and mental muscle strength for success at work.

The firm's founder, Henna Pryor, is a sought-after Workplace Performance Expert who speaks and writes about performance mindset, interpersonal dynamics, high-impact communication, and embracing bumps in a world that keeps optimizing for smoothness. In addition to her passion for sparkly new research, she's a regular Expert Columnist for Inc. Magazine, 18x award-winning author of *Good Awkward*, and an in-demand global keynote speaker. Her clients call her their "secret weapon for impossible change," an honor she wears proudly.

In addition to speaking for TEDx, SXSW, and being frequently tapped by media outlets like Business.com, FastCompany, INSIDER, HuffPost, NBC, FOX, and more, she's a SUCCESS Magazine Woman of Influence, [LinkedIn](#) Learning Instructor, and Glassdoor WorkLife Pro. Her book was also named a Kirkus Reviews' Best Book of the Year.

Download the full study: [prioritygroup.com/study](https://prioritygroup.com/study)

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