

“Managing Gossip in the Workplace”

Perhaps you know the horror of emailing a derogatory comment about your supervisor to a co-worker, when to your embarrassment you click the supervisors address instead! My mother nailed it when she used to say, Billy, if you don't have anything nice to say doesn't say it at all. Yet when we gossip in the workplace, generally “not nice” and inaccurate words are stated that can never be taken back. Consequently reputations can be ruined, trust is broken down within the organization, morale drops and productivity decreases.

The growing # 1 enemy in Corporate America is gossip in the workplace. Statistically, it suggested that at least 36% of employees/employers gossip, some, regularly, others on occasion. Approximately 86% of what people around the cooler gossip about are corporate challenges within that particular organization. Although gossip cannot be completely eradicated at the office, it can be reduced and managed much more carefully.

Gossip defined goes something like this: any language that would cause harm, pain or confusion that is used outside the presence of the one it is intended for.

Some of the sad results of this slanderous practice:

- *a decrease in work productivity***
- *the dividing of staff into “clicks”***
- *compromise of professional standards***
- *supervisors are emotionally exhausted***
- *If allowed to continue, staff loses confidence in administration***

Those who choose to gossip as a form of communication are usually insecure individuals and generally do not feel successful. They frequently are driven to fit in socially and have never learned healthy conflict management skills. In addition, they have an act for seeking out disgruntled employees and refuse to reveal the source their information.

Listed below are a few suggestions to reduce gossip:

- *Stay busy with the task at hand. Gossip is a time sapper!*
- *Keep your private life private*
- *Bring the parties of concern together*
- *Go to your immediate supervisor if the gossip persists.*
- *Assert that you are “uncomfortable with where this conversation is going,”*

Or ask “why are you giving me this information”?

The next time you are tempted to pass on inappropriate information I recommend you ask yourself a few questions first.

- *Is it true, kind, or necessary?*
- *How would I feel if these things were said about me?*
- *Am I dishonoring my personal values by gossiping?*

Please understand that there always remains a need to legitimately vent frustrations to the right people at the right time. However, venting and gossip are vastly different. Venting seems to be solution oriented but gossip resist solutions. Venting will do what is ultimately best for the organization but gossip is self motivated.

I recommend administration devise a “Workplace Expectation” in order to reduce gossip. Such an example would read:

“Do not participate in spreading gossip and rumors, and do not tolerate it from others. Rumor and gossip sabotages the team’s ability to work together effectively. It is disrespectful, nonproductive, and a selfishly motivated act that impedes employees from performing their jobs. If you hear about an issue that pertains directly to you, verify the accuracy of the information by asking the supervisor or the coworker involved, rather than simply passing on the information.”

To summarize for any who want their place of employment to be a safe place where trust is the norm and communication is healthy, I offer 3 suggestions:

- 1) Make the decision to no longer participate.*
- 2) Have the discipline to stick with your personal values.*
- 3) Be direct about your commitment to the proper way of managing frustrations in the organization.*