

A CULTURE WITHOUT GOSSIP

Do employees at your company engage in gossip? So what? What does it hurt?

Gossip, or as my mother would say, “Talking about people who aren’t in the room,” leads to lost productivity, low morale and unnecessary turnover. While gossip is often lead by frightened, less productive employees, it is a trap that even well intentioned staff can easily fall into. Gossip invariably leads to a corrosive environment, and contributes to the following:

1. Employees engaged in gossip are not being productive while engaging in gossip.
2. Gossip, using untruth and speculation, often pits valuable employees against each other.
3. Employees who are the target of gossip become disengaged and their productivity suffers.
4. All employees begin to lose trust in the organization as the workplace becomes unsafe.
5. Top performers seek other employment when they no longer will endure a toxic environment.
6. The company suffers negative financial impact from loss of productivity and unnecessary turnover.

Prevention of gossip starts at the top. From the CEO’s office, through Reception and every department in between, gossip should not be tolerated. Leadership must set the example by not discussing employee’s personal matters without them present. Human Resources can help your organization set two basic ground rules:

1. Do not promise to have “off the record” conversations about other people. If a co-worker starts a conversation by saying they want to give you information about someone else, but don’t want you to ever tell anyone they told you, politely end the conversation. If the issue is worthy of discussing at work (because it had impact on the work place and process) you have an obligation to communicate anything that threatens productivity, security, or integrity. Let the employee know that you are happy to help them, but anyone discussed may need to be brought into the conversation at some point.

2. Do NOT GOSSIP. Ask yourself these simple questions:
 - a. Why am I talking about this person with someone else?
 - b. If my intention is to help, am I talking to the correct person?
 - c. Should I be talking directly to the person I am discussing?
 - d. Will my conversation be harmful?
 - e. Am I being 100% TRUTHFUL (often gossip is biased to gain advantage).

While these two rules are paramount for the HR professional, clearly they are applicable to all employees. Often, the instigators of gossip engage unsuspecting participants by gaining confidence and a sense of “belonging” with a co-worker, but it is wise to remember, if someone is talking to you about someone else, they are probably talking about you with someone else.

To keep your work environment free from gossip and toxic attitudes, proactively promote an “API” rule. ASSUME POSITIVE INTENT. Until proven wrong, assume that your company owners, your leaders, your manager, your employees, and everyone who contributes to your mission, are doing their best. If your owner and leadership are instituting new programs, assume they are doing it to improve your work environment (and not to set a trap). If your coworker corrects a mistake, assume they are trying to help you improve your work quality and efficiency (and not embarrass you or challenge you). And while you are at it, promote positive intent by acknowledging when someone has done something helpful or well. An authentic “Thank You” is powerful corporate fuel.

Protect your corporate culture to protect your job satisfaction and your bottom line.

For more information, or for answers to any questions, contact:

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