

Feature

Managing Gossip in Workplace

Stop the ongoing epidemic

Gossip is widespread in the workplace. At times, it appears as if employees have nothing better to do than gossip about each other. They chat about their organization, their coworkers and their bosses. They often take a half truth and flip it into an entire hypothetical reality. Speculating on the team's future, who will let go, who is seeing who and what employees are doing in their personal lives.

Employees are capable of gossiping about everything and they do in a workplace that fails to bring about a stop to the chatting employees.

A certain amount of gossip is likely to occur in any workplace. Employees are curious to know what is going on and like to chat about work matters. The essential point is to determine when the gossip is inappropriate. If the gossip is inappropriate and not addressed, it may lead to low employee morale or a toxic work environment.

As a manager, the need to stop the gossiping occurs when it becomes disruptive to the workplace and the business of work, it is hurting employees' feelings, it is damaging interpersonal relationships or injuring employee motivation and morale.

Since research shows that gossip is disruptive in the workplace, what can we do to address it? Let us look at a few different approaches as a team and as an individual to addressing gossip in the workplace.

When you deal with gossip as a team, consider putting a ban on gossiping. Some workplaces have adopted an official ban on workplace gossip by having employees sign a pledge. Although extreme it may be effective. To discourage gossiping, encourage employees to speak to each other about issues that are causing them problems before they bring it to their supervisors or other parties' attention.

In the age of social media, it becomes easier to spread rumours and gossip about others. This can cause tremendous harm to the culture of the workplace. Organizations today need to deal with social media and keep an eye on emails, personal blogs and Facebook discussions among employees. Finally, confront rumours promptly. Providing factual information about layoffs, problematic situations or surplus of employees serve them better than to leave them speculating on their own. It is important to discuss the impact that gossip may have in the workplace. Discuss openly the differences between active communication and gossip. In today's workplace, verbal harassment has legal ramifications. Employers have a duty to take action against verbal harassment when they become aware of it.

In dealing with gossip as an individual, always share information.

Be generous with the non-confidential material. This has proven to put a check on the gossip mill. Interestingly closed doors can set off alarms even if the intent is innocent.

Let people know that you may be interrupted at any time unless in a private meeting. Be sensitive about appearances.

Often rumours and gossip form around cliques in the workplace. Try to avoid forming groups and reach out to new people to keep the loop open. If all else fails, walk away. Gossip loses its momentum when there is no audience.



Monica Jensen,
RPT
Principal,
The Aviary Group

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Find a way to tactfully suggest a more efficient channel for complaining or remove yourself from the discussion. If you start to focus on the positive qualities of your colleagues, you will automatically have nice things to say about each other.

Workplaces that have the highest levels of gossip seem to be the ones where employees are not engaging in work duties. Stay busy. If your day is full of tasks which you find thought-provoking and rewarding, you will be less likely to get distracted by trivial activities.

We spend long hours at our job. Make a point of cultivating relationships and activities outside your workplace. Having strong relationships outside the office often provides sources of emotional support and objective advice.

Unfortunately lurking at the extreme end of the gossip spectrum is workplace bullying. What may seem as harmless rumors to some, may amount to intimidation and harassment for the targeted employees. Complications of physical and mental health issues arise and need to be addressed in the proper forum.

Finally, become a role model. Do not indulge in any gossip yourself. Become a leader in this area. Do not feel the need to chat in order to feel connected, liked or to be informed about your team. Taking a stand to prevent random gossiping creates a better work environment for everyone.

Monika Jensen is Principal of the Aviary Group and can be contacted by email at mjensen@aviarygroup.ca.