



Oh office gossip.

It's so juicy, right?

And it's so damaging.

Today we're going to talk about how you can effectively handle workplace gossip, rumors, and venting in a way that positively impacts your team culture.

Now I know venting doesn't usually get grouped together with gossip and rumors. It's here because it falls into that general category of talking to and about people. It's not something we think of as damaging, but it can be just as harmful as these other two.

It matters because all of these can and do break trust and destroy morale. They undermine the credibility of the person being talked about and the person doing the talking.

They waste a whole lot of time in productivity while increasing divisiveness, hurting feelings, and reputations, causing some people to leave. In the most extreme cases, they are ruining people's lives.

Maybe even yours.

I don't say that to be alarmist or to scare you. I just want you to always be looking out for yourself and protecting yourself.

What is challenging for you about this?

I don't think that you are busy at work gossiping and spreading rumors, but it is likely that other people may be coming to you to spread gossip and rumors. What do you say and what do you do when that happens?

What is challenging for you about that?

How can you shift your mindset to better serve you?

Let's talk about that venting. Venting, while it might seem harmless and natural, you're having a tough day, a tough situation, you're feeling really emotional, but there are a lot of problems with venting. One of which is who you're venting to. It might be somebody that you think you can trust but you just don't ever know.

Again, I don't want to come off as overly cynical. I just want you to always protect yourself. Be really careful what you're saying and who you're saying it to.

Even if the person you're saying it to never discloses anything, when people see you walking into an office and closing a door and looking really animated they might make up their own stories about what you're talking about.



Perception is everything and you don't want to give people a reason to create stories that simply aren't true. Be very careful what you're saying and who you're saying it to and be especially careful with your team.

Do whatever you need to do not to vent to your team because again, even if what you're saying is considered harmless, you don't know how they're going to receive and relay the information and also your other team members might be looking from the outside in and saying, *why does she always talk to her?*

They might think there's some level of favoritism.

Do not vent to your team. If you have to vent to someone, choose that someone very very carefully.

The other thing to consider is- don't try to pass the responsibility on to somebody else to save yourself. Even if it's completely true.

A lot of times when we are leading, especially when we're new at it, we don't want to be perceived as the bad one. Especially if it's not something we did. We might be really quick to say, *hey, team, I'm with you and the mean old boss wants us to work on Saturday*, thinking that it builds camaraderie with your team, but it doesn't. It undermines your credibility because you're showing your team that you're willing to throw someone else under the bus.

Naturally they're going to think, *maybe she'll do it to me too*, right?

The other thing is- when people are upset about a decision that was made, they don't really care if it was you or somebody else. They want it to be fixed. They want it to move forward and make it better. Don't spend your time and energy trying to blame someone else. Be a leader. Apologize that they're inconvenienced and do your best to remedy it.

A couple of things to remember.

The first is- don't say anything about someone that you wouldn't also say to their face. That's a general rule of thumb. Not a perfect one, but it's a good rule to follow.

The asterisk there is- you need to be really cautious about privileged and confidential information.

You might be perfectly comfortable confronting someone with information like, *if you don't clean up your act, they're gonna fire you and I just want to let you know*.

You might be trying to do that as a friend, but you might not have any business sharing that kind of information. So be really, really careful about what you're disclosing.

When it comes to your staff, don't say anything to one staff member that you wouldn't say to every staff member.



Of course, you're not going to have repeat conversations with everybody in the name of equity. It means that if you're saying something that might be sort of hinting that you're talking about somebody else or that you're sharing something that you wouldn't share with other people then it's best just not to say it at all.

The best thing you can do in the workplace to let everybody know that you are not interested in gossip and rumors is to set an example. That you don't ever participate in them and you certainly don't start them.

You set a culture on your own team that that is not tolerated.

Be careful and keep your private life private.

Of course when you're building relationships with people at work, you're going to talk about your weekend and your vacation and your family but know where your boundaries are. Know where the lines are. Don't disclose more than you should be disclosing. And have a strategy.

A lot of times when somebody comes to us and we're caught off guard, we don't really know what to say, so we don't say anything. Don't wait for it to happen.

Get a line ready ahead of time that you can say and you feel comfortable saying if somebody comes to you with a rumor or gossip and you want to let them know in no uncertain terms that you don't want to be a part of it.

There are some examples here. Maybe not the best examples in the world, but it's a starting point. You can take any or all of these and make them your own or create your own.

Some ideas are to say:

*I'm not interested in talking about that.*

*I don't talk about people behind their backs.*

*Let's change the subject.*

*Let's talk about something else.*

You don't need to go into apology mode, like, *Oh, I don't mean any offense or I know you didn't really mean it.*

Nope.

You're not the one doing anything wrong. Just say what you need to say and be done with it.



In addition to something you might want to have ready to say you can have an action in addition or instead of so you can simply walk away. That speaks volumes.

You can ignore them or ignore the statement.

You can say something positive instead.

If they say, 'oh, I just can't stand working with Carol in accounting', you can say, 'oh really? I love working with her.'

That's usually enough to keep them quiet because people who like to spread gossip and rumors are looking to keep them going.

If you show them that you're not interested in keeping it going then they'll just go on to the next person.

If it's on your team, you're in a different position and you have to address it immediately with your team to let them know that this is not the culture of your team and you don't want it spreading to everybody else.

Be very clear when you hear someone say something, when they say it to you, when someone tells you someone said something, however, you receive that information, act on it immediately and clearly. Let them know that that is not tolerated.

A big reason why rumors circulate at workplaces are related to things people aren't clear about and things that they're anxious about.

If there's a rumor that starts going around that there are going to be layoffs or the boss is about to retire or whatever, and people don't have the information, that's when they start gossiping. In that case you need to step in and share whatever you're able to share at that moment. It might not be much. The best you might be able to say is, 'hey, I know there are some concerns about layoffs. I don't have any information for you right now, but I promise I'll let you know anything as soon as I know it too'.

That's it. Just address what you're able to address and that might help squash some of those rumors.

Be aware of cliques on your team. You can't completely eliminate them- they're natural.

You can't control who texts who or who meets who outside of working hours, but you can control how much you are working on intentionally building your team and the relationships on your team.

So, the most important question for you is, how will you manage gossip rumors and venting at your work?