

Improving Relationships

The Scoop on Workplace

Gossip



Now here's something that'll get your coworkers buzzing: According to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, up to 90% of workplace conversation is gossip. Is it possible?

If this statistic is anywhere close to the mark, it's obvious that your coworkers are discussing YOU with greater frequency than you'd ever imagined. And although you may not consider yourself a busybody, you're clearly talking about THEM quite a bit as well.

So what are we to make of all this? First, don't take this as a sign of societal decay. Despite its bad reputation, gossip isn't all bad.

Why Gossip Can Be Good

There's more to gossip than petty, rumor-mongering. According to researchers, gossip is primarily driven by a desire to enforce social norms and ensure that each member of the group pulls his or her own weight.

Surprisingly, a great deal of workplace gossip is positive. It's also important to keep in mind that even when gossip is negative, it isn't necessarily malicious. According to the study, negative gossip is often driven by the desire to warn group members against the harmful or inappropriate behavior of others.

To Gossip or Not to Gossip

Gossip is one way that human beings bond with each other, so don't shun it completely. A little bit of gossip can go a long way toward building important workplace relationships.

- **Don't** try to eradicate gossip or scold others for engaging in it. People gossip. It's a natural human interaction. Judging others for it is a sure way of being ostracized from the group.
- **Gossip** in small doses. Researchers say those who gossip excessively or with too many people are perceived as untrustworthy.
- **Become** a listener rather than a talker. Keep your own comments about others positive and brief.
- **Don't** hesitate to engage in trivial gossip about sports, entertainment or other subjects that your coworkers show interest in. Remember; gossip is one of the primary ways in which people bond.
- **Avoid** taking sides in personal disputes.
- **Evaluate** trustworthiness and credibility of others before acting on gossip. Not everything you hear is true.
- **Ask** follow up questions when gossip turns to matters that might affect you. Walk away when gossip becomes nasty or personal.
- **Pay** close attention to workplace alliances and friendships and use this knowledge to your benefit.
- **Note** which employees consistently badmouth others. If they're doing it to everyone else, they're doing it to you.

Using Gossip to Improve Your Image

Gossip an alternative means of communication that can help you achieve things that traditional communication sometimes cannot.

For example, gossip is a great way to float an idea or get feedback on a project you've been working on. This can be as simple as asking a few people, "Hey, what's the buzz on (X)? Do people like where we're going with this?"

Gossip can also be used strategically to magnify the power of a compliment. Delivering a compliment second hand accomplishes two things:

- 1) The person you've complimented will be flattered to hear someone was speaking well of him.
- 2) Your image as a positive and sincere person will be enhanced.

Finally, there's nothing wrong with occasionally dropping a self-promotional comment to someone you know will repeat it. Few things punch up your image more than other people doing your bragging for you.

For more information, call your Employee Assistance Program at (800) 563-8201 or (402) 434-2900.