The High Price of Gossip

Gossip is harmful and potentially very risky to both employees and their organization. When people talk about each other behind their backs in the workplace, it can be ruinously expensive. Teamwork can be destroyed; morale deflated and careers halted. Gossip can clearly become a discrimination issue if it includes commentary about a protected class (racial, ethnic, religious, gender, sexual preference, age or disability). In addition, the following can occur:

- Productivity is lost due to the amount of time employees spend gossiping.
- One’s credibility is compromised by spreading gossip.
- People are hurt and the effect can linger indefinitely even when the gossip about them dies down. Gossip thrives in environments where honest communication is not valued or encouraged.

Reducing Workplace Gossip

- Learn to speak honestly and respectfully.
- Be clear and consistent with others that you will not tolerate being a recipient of gossip. Remember that some people try to build themselves up by tearing others down. Such behavior is often a result of jealousy. A helpful suggestion is to say something like this:

  "People can get hurt when they are gossiped about. It keeps us from trusting one another, and when we don’t trust each other, it’s difficult to focus on our work."

  "I would prefer not to hear this."

- Model the kind of behavior you desire. People with low self-esteem may believe that gossiping will elevate their status, thus giving them a sense of false power. Remember that you cannot change someone else but you can change your own patterns of behavior. You can make a decision today not to engage further in spreading rumors or malicious gossip.
- Be aware that in today’s competitive work environment, gossip most often comes from a place of envy or ignorance. With persistence, however, this harmful behavior can stop.

The Bottom Line

Refuse to tolerate malicious gossip and do your part to work towards the establishment of a healthy, resilient, supportive and safe workplace.