

Sent:

Sun, 7 Jul 2019 04:24:52 +0000

Subject:

Week 79 learnings - Workplace Gossip

Dear All

Over my career, I have seen that gossip kills trust and morale in an organization and I have never indulged in it. Every time I've had someone talk something negative about others, I have done my own checks or forwarded the complaint/comment to the appropriate people to handle. I see signs of this in some quarters and have had some complaints on it and hence this note of my learnings:

1. What is gossip and how does it differ from harmless leg pulling? Idle chit chat , leg pulling is part and parcel of the workplace. When the comments turn to negative, are inflammatory, are embarrassing, are intended to hurt and pull down a colleague, then its gossip.
2. Why do people gossip? Gossipers are desperados, immature, insecure, envious of others, want to show their superiority and hence tend to indulge in it. Human beings are social animals and we always want to know more about others so we try to add two and two and make something out of it. Most gossip tends to be negative and never positive.
3. The most used gossip I have seen people gossip about - relationships, money and habits. I have seen genuine friendships and mentorships being misrepresented. Not everything in life is a quid pro quo and gossipers never understand that.
4. For every gossipier to flourish, there is also an immature recipient who swallows the rubbish. So gossipers thrive on others insecurities or need for attention or need for knowledge. So, as leaders, if we make information more freely available, we will curtail this behavior.
5. If gossip goes unchecked, it lowers the professional prestige of people, especially senior managers and that's dangerous for the organization. This is something we should guard against.
6. There is a common myth that women tend to gossip more than men. In my experience men are worse, the worst gossipers were my colleagues in one team of Hindustan lever, a bunch of very insecure people who were constantly back biting about others. I've never worked in a more terrible team ! When you have a bunch of highly driven achievers, then one tends to see two types of behavior , the first being a collaborative approach and a challenging approach where everyone gets better and the second is a backbiting gossip culture. So gossip is inherent to ambition, specifically failed ambition when someone feels that he/she is losing out.
7. A form of official corporate gossip is bee, mark someone else without letting others know. I see a lot of this.

So, what does one do about it when one encounters it in the workplace?

1. Gossip is a violation of basic decency and values in an organization. So this is as bad as any harassment, this is in fact mental harassment. United technologies released ad about what gossip does in an organization many years ago, I found that fascinating and used to have it at my desk as a reminder to the ill effects of it. So, first rule do not participate, confront the gossipier and shun the gossipier.
2. Second, do not hesitate to report this to your manager, not as a complaint but as something that you do not approve of. There will always be good souls in an organization who care about the organization so they will act on it.

Feedback welcome, and do not tolerate gossip is my message to you, never be a victim of it.

Wr

Shiv