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## Combating Gossip in the Workplace

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We are all aware of the negative effects gossip can have on relationships at school or even at home, but what about the toll it takes in the workplace? Gossip will destroy relationships, ruin confidence and create an overall negative atmosphere. In the workplace, gossip will lead to low morale and low worker productivity, or even an elevated employee turnover rate. It is important for businesses to keep gossip in check and handle it appropriately. Three steps that businesses can take towards reducing negative gossip in the workplace may include the following: acknowledging the problem, addressing the perpetrator, and encouraging positive gossip instead of the negative kind.

Not only have I experienced the effects that negative gossip can have on a team of part-time workers, but I have also seen what it can do to full-time sales associates. In my dad's dealership this past year he has had to address the issue of gossip on a number of levels multiple times. Sales can be an extremely competitive field, however, this competition should be fairly treated based on skills and dedication. In the case of the GM dealership, I am discussing how things got out of hand. The dealership has kept the same team of sales associates for years until recently when they started hiring applicants to form a new team. All was good and well for the first few months until one particular employee began to start a private campaign to get another employee fired. This sales associate had done a wonderful job and was one of the top sellers, but clearly felt threatened when a newer sales associate began to show the same sales ability as herself. It was not long before the sales manager began to receive multiple complaints about her gossip and bullying of other workers. It took losing another well-performing sales associate's resignation before the gossip was dealt with directly. A coworker, who engages in negative gossip, is harmful to an entire team of workers which in turn will create even larger problems, such as high employee turnover rates if not properly dealt with.

The first step a company should take towards dealing with gossip is acknowledging it. According to Kevin Johnston (n.d.), a writer for Ameriprise Financial, the issue of gossip should be acknowledged as soon as it begins, and before it becomes a problem; it is important to "move courageously and quickly to stop gossip before it damages the work environment and causes serious consequences."

The second solution, and maybe the most important, is directly addressing the perpetrator. It is important to deal directly with the employee responsible for facilitating office gossip. Lisa Quast, a career coach and former Fortune 500 executive, suggests that the employee should be met with privately and spoken with directly by management. Quast (2013) claims that gossip "can lead to a culture of distrust..." Therefore, it is important to remind the perpetrator of the negative impacts of their behavior and remind them of the common goals the company shares and how they are important to achieving those goals.

Another method of mitigating negative gossip may be to encourage positive gossip. Erin Schreiner (n.d.), freelance writer and teacher, suggests that "sometimes gossip can actually improve the workplace climate, strengthening relationships instead of breaking them down." When workers focus on the positive aspects of their co-workers it can create a true sense of camaraderie and make a team even stronger. Schreiner suggests setting a good example speaking highly of employee's accomplishments or even just their positive traits and encouraging others to do the same. When workers feel appreciated and valued they will likely be comfortable contributing ideas as they will feel more accepted.

Gossip may lead to a number of negative trends including a decline in worker productivity and a negative and distracting work atmosphere. When the correct steps are taken, however, towards mitigating workplace gossip, positive environments may be better maintained and productivity increased. Most important to combating gossip is acknowledging the problem, directly addressing the perpetrator, and encouraging positive workplace gossip. Following these important steps will help make it possible to stifle gossip before it catches on, remind a gossip of their place in the workplace, and even create a warm and positive working environment in which employees will be encouraged to share ideas comfortably. Overall, keeping negative gossip out of the workplace can lead to better productivity and a healthier working

### Reference List

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