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While gossip around the water cooler or over cubicle walls may seem like just another form of friendly office banter, it can be far from harmless. Office gossip is usually divided into two types: institutional, aka rumors about the company, and personal, aka rumors about an individual. "Institutional gossip tends to run its course. When none of the rumors prove to have merit, they die down and others surface. It's more a case of human behavior, people wanting to feel in control of their destiny, than willful desire to sabotage the organization," says leadership coach Marian Thier. But if rumors remain rampant, employee morale can suffer at every level of your organization. And personal gossip is almost always hurtful. "Left unchecked, personal gossip can impair an entire department's ability to work together as well as a person's trust in those who let it continue," says Thier. Since the single most important factor contributing to employee engagement is an employee's relationship with his or her supervisor, it's your job to cut both kinds of gossip off at the pass. Here are 3 tips to prevent office gossip:



1. Promote Positive Sharing

Career coach Lisa Quast says that effective leaders should encourage employees to share positive news and company success stories. "For example, a manager at a medical device company can communicate stories of the lives saved by the automated external defibrillator the company makes – which can help employees feel proud of where they work," says Quast. Dale Carnegie Trainers tell students it is essential to praise even small improvements (rather than constantly criticizing shortcomings) and positive gossip is an effective way to do that.

2. Lead by Example

Your employees will learn what you expect from them by listening to and watching you. "The best and most powerful strategy to eliminate or minimize gossip is to convey through words and actions that it is unacceptable," says executive coach Roy Cohen. Dale Carnegie Trainers teach that new employees are especially vulnerable to low levels of engagement. They're also at risk of trying to "fit in" and this may include participating in gossip. By addressing your expectations during orientations, you can begin to gossip from your company culture.

3. Use Technology to Send Your Message

If your company's issue is with institutional, rather than personal, gossip, you can thwart rumors by addressing them on internal social networking sites or by email, says career consultant Allan Steinmetz. If institutional gossip is left unchecked and not discouraged, it can lead to low engagement, which Dale Carnegie research has shown is a major risk factor for retention problems.

Bottom line? Gossip has no place in a professional setting. "It is a destructive problem that takes the focus away from the strategy of the company and onto innuendo and untruths. It is the role of an effective leadership team to prevent this from happening by aligning their team and maintaining open and frequent communications," says Steinmetz.

For more information about how to [prevent office gossip](#), visit Dale Carnegie's site! Or learn other [effective leadership tips](#) for more preventative measures.

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