

# Faculty and Employee Assistance Program Newsletter

## Workplace Gossip

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**“So live that you wouldn’t be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip”  
Will Rogers**

We’ve all experienced it. You step into the elevator and overhear two other riders talking about someone else in a conspiratorial manner. You may or may not know the person they are discussing. The “idle gossip” may arouse your curiosity, and you might find yourself straining to “hear more” of the conversation. Or what they are saying may be so hurtful that it makes you wince.



Gossip in the workplace is about as common as office collections. Most of us have engaged in it at one time or another. But workplace gossip causes a great deal of harm and impacts both the individuals involved, and the organization as a whole.

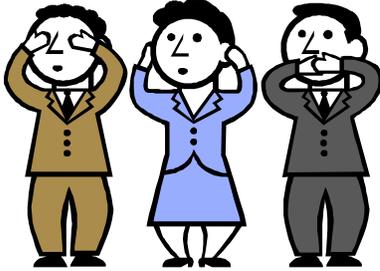
Here are just a few examples of the cost of workplace gossip:

- Lost productivity and wasted time.
- Morale and trust are eroded.
- Increased anxiety among employees as rumors circulate without any clear information as to what is fact and what isn’t.
- Divisiveness tends to grow among employees as people may “take sides”.
- Feelings and reputations are hurt, sometimes causing severe damage.
- The “gossipers” may jeopardize chances for their own advancement because they are perceived as unprofessional.
- Good employees may leave the company due to the unhealthy work atmosphere.

People who engage in workplace gossip may do so for several reasons. They may have a strong need to “fit in”, and feel that gossip will help them achieve this. Unfortunately, gossiping often has the opposite effect. Gossipers often suffer from low self-esteem, and think that talking about others or spreading rumors makes them feel important, or powerful. Like any unhealthy behavior, gossiping does not increase self esteem or make the gossiper feel more in control.

It’s very easy to get drawn in to the gossip circle, and often difficult to resist. Here are some tips to avoid getting involved in non-productive and sometimes destructive gossip.

First it takes a decision to not participate in the workplace rumor and gossip mill. Then it requires discipline to stick to your guns and take a stand. If coworkers attempt to draw you in to their gossip, let them know directly that you aren't interested in participating in this type of conversation. You don't have to be critical or judgmental, but just clear about your own feelings of discomfort talking about something or someone when you don't have all the facts, and excuse yourself from the conversation.



This will serve several purposes. It will send a message to the gossipers that what they are doing is not acceptable. Others who feel the same way you do will be more likely to follow suit and not become involved with the gossip, thus taking away the audience. And lastly, you will feel good that you have said "no" to a something that wastes time and could cause harm.

It's always a good idea to step back and ask yourself several questions when you are tempted to participate in rumors or gossip:

- Is what I am about to say true?
- Is it harmless?
- Is it necessary?
- How would I feel if someone said something similar about me?
- How would I feel if I saw my words quoted in the daily paper tomorrow?
- How am I going to feel later if I say this? (or listen to this)
- Does gossiping honor my own personal values?

Much is to be gained by turning down the opportunity to gossip while at work. And it's not as hard as you might think. With conscious effort and conviction, you can do your part to derail the harmful effects of destructive gossip and keep the work environment healthy and happy for all.

**"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment".**

- Dorothy Nevill

If you need help with this or other personal issues, please contact the FEAP at (434) 243-2643 or visit our website at [www.uvafeap.com](http://www.uvafeap.com).



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