

Reducing Conflict 24 Don't Talk Behind Peoples Backs

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



A common way of creating conflict in an organization is to gossip about other people behind their backs. No matter how you try to keep the bad-mouthing discreet, the information is eventually going to leak around the edges, and you will suffer a loss of trust.

It is easy to observe small cliques generating rumors about other groups in order to gain positional power over them. The dynamic is in play nearly every day in many organizations, and the price of such foolishness is huge. What if we could create an environment of high trust such that people would not play games with each other?

The Cure

To prevent the inevitable conflict, make it your business to have high integrity and not work to undermine others behind their backs. I think it is helpful if a group gets together and established a group expectation that we will not spread rumors about each other.

That rule gives people permission to exit any conversation that seems to be heading in the direction of low integrity. People can simply stop the action by saying, "I am not interested in discussions that include speculation about other people."

Why People Gossip

I believe that some people are inclined to gossip more than others. Sometimes it may be out of personal insecurity themselves. In addition, some people try to gain status or power by being a person "in the know." The interesting phenomenon is that the person may be doing it to gain power when the end result is the exact opposite.

When people in the group recognize you as someone who spreads gossip about others, your power goes DOWN dramatically. The reason is that people will be wary about what you might be telling others about them. If your intention was to amplify your own power, you are actually achieving the opposite.

Make Integrity a Value

By having a group value of high integrity, you can obtain consensus that we only speak in support of each other. If something seems like it is not right, we will take it up with the other person directly. That is modeling a value of integrity that cuts through all the game-playing so people can begin to trust one another.

Leaders need to show the way by not allowing marginal discussions in their own sphere and insisting that others in the organization model the same behavior. By doing so, you cut off the problem before it starts to undermine the morale of the group.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to create a culture where people don't talk behind other people's backs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KMDPoTg0y8>

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.