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A Possible Workplace Resolution for 2007?

We're all used to making resolutions for the New Year. Typically, these pertain to a healthier lifestyle, improving our relationships with family or friends or learning new skills.

But maybe 2007 can also be a year in which we resolve to make the workplace a friendlier, more cooperative environment – after all, most of us spend one-third of our day there! “But”, you may be saying, “I am already a good and reliable worker. I am punctual, persistent and dedicated. Oh, yeah, once in a while I might engage in a little harmless gossip.”

Harmless?

Kit Hennessy, a Licensed Professional Counselor, states “There is no denying the fact that gossip can wreak havoc in an organization...and when directed against an individual, it has the potential to ruin a reputation and destroy someone’s character in front of the entire organization.” Other corrosive effects of workplace gossip typically include:

- Morale and trust are eroded
- Divisiveness may grow as employees “take sides”
- Victims may retaliate
- The gossipers may jeopardize their own advancement because they are seen as unprofessional
- Good employees may feel “iced out” of the workplace social dynamic

Gossipers often suffer from low self-esteem and think that talking about others or spreading rumors is empowering. However, no one really “feels good” about oneself after tearing another person down. But let’s be truthful, it’s very easy to get drawn into the gossip circle and often difficult to resist. So here are some tips to avoid getting involved in non-productive and sometimes destructive gossip at work:

- Make a personal decision to not participate in the rumor or gossip mill. You don’t have to be critical or judgmental, but just admit openly that you feel uncomfortable talking about others.
- Allow yourself to feel good, rather than embarrassed, about taking a stand against gossip
- If tempted to participate in gossip, ask yourself: Is what I am about to say true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary? How would I feel if something similar was said about me? How am I going to feel later if I say this? Am I honoring my personal values?

Author Dorothy Nevill once said, “The real art of conversation is not only saying the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” Or as humorist Will Rogers put it, “So live that you won’t be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip!”

Taking a personal stand against workplace gossip during the coming year will serve several purposes. It will send a clear message to gossipers that what they are doing is unacceptable. Others will admire your values and will likely follow suit. But best of all, you will feel good that you have said “no” to something that wastes time, can cause great harm and may induce personal guilt once the damage is done.