

The Sand Paper

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SAND CREEK GROUP, LTD.
RESOURCES WITHOUT BARRIERS

Getting Along At Work

by Dr. Gretchen Stein, President & CEO of The Sand Creek Group.

The number one concern people present to our employee assistance program is relationship problems. Finding harmony with the people in our lives, at home and at work, seems a challenge for many. This quarter's edition of The Sand Paper offers helpful suggestions for creating more respectful, harmonious, and healthy workplace relationships.

One article focuses on gossip. Once something negative and hurtful is said, it is impossible to take it back. Words are powerful. Gossip can significantly impact morale and team

work. This article offers ways to improve the environment by watching our words and what we say about our co-workers.

Work stress, conflict, lack of clarity, lack of support, and working with a constant overload all lead to an unhealthy work environment and, frankly, make us ill. Another article discusses the important role good management plays in creating a healthy work environment.

Helping people get along is what the Employee Assistance Program does so well. Feeling good about



who you are and how you contribute to your workplace is a good place to start with creating a healthy work environment. Please call your EAP for additional help and support. We welcome your call.

Unlikely Stress Reducers

by Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP

When we are overwhelmed and feel burdened with tasks, we often get more self-absorbed as well. Our brain is so busy focusing on our lists of what needs to get done that we may tune out others and stop engaging in dialogue other than task-related discussion.

A couple of the things that often decline in the workplace and at home during high stress times are common acts of

thoughtfulness and appreciation. Four things each of us can do every day to help interrupt our own worry cycle and broaden our awareness of others are:

1. Take the time to notice what someone has done for you and thank them directly.
2. Stop and look around to see what you can compliment someone on.

3. Find some element of humor in at least one aspect of your day.
4. Give yourself 5 minutes to sit and do absolutely nothing other than breathe. As you breathe, try to focus on your breath rather than the thoughts in your head. For 5 minutes, try to have your head and body in the same place.



"The good news is that we will always have a choice about our own behavior."

What Can We Do About Gossip At Work?

by Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP

"Hey, did you hear what Sara said yesterday? I couldn't believe she could be so petty!" If we each pause for a minute and consider our work day, most of us probably hear or participate in several forms of gossip every day at work. Generally gossip can be thought of as communication about someone that is used outside of their presence and would likely cause harm, hurt, or confusion to them if they knew of it. Gossip seems to occur for a variety of reasons that include:

- Wanting to feel like you are part of a group; bonding with co-workers at the expense of someone else.
- Feeling frustrated and wanting to vent and be supported for your feelings.
- Wanting focus or attention.
- Undermining someone with whom you have a conflict.
- Looking for power in a relationship.

If asked, most individuals would identify gossip as a negative work behavior, and yet it remains pervasive in the workplace. It can have a

powerful impact on morale, create more conflict, fuel assumptions, and generate resentments.

Gossip is something that management can overtly discourage, but ultimately each person in the workplace needs to make a decision about their own participation in gossip. Some questions to ask yourself are:

- Does gossip fit with my values of how I want to treat people?
- Do I like what gossip brings out in me?
- If I were parenting, what would I tell my child about gossiping?
- What do I get from participating in gossip?
- Are there other ways to get my needs met?
- What impact does gossip have in my workplace?

It's not easy to catch ourselves with gossip. It takes a conscious awareness and intention to make a change. Sometimes gossip is the path of least resistance, so it is helpful to have a plan of how we want to respond instead of participating. One suggestion is to not

respond to someone else's gossip. Instead, try to change the subject or let the person know you'd rather not focus on the individual that isn't present. Try shifting gears and ask a question relevant to the two of you having a conversation and not about the person who is not present. Or, consider something positive you may be able to say about the person being talked about.

Try experimenting with these behaviors and notice how it affects your own attitude, your conversations, and your feelings about your coworkers. In a workplace that has less gossip, there tends to be more feelings of trust and fewer opportunities for negative assumptions to be made. The behavior of gossip has a long history and offers many opportunities to participate. The good news is that we will always have a choice about our own behavior, and the more individuals that choose not to gossip, the more enjoyable a work environment can be for everyone.

The Impact of Leadership On A Healthy Workplace: A Business Case

by Lisa Dau, MA, LP, CEAP



Many work places have discovered that by promoting the health of employees, the health of the organization is well-served. However, when we think about health promotion in the workplace, what probably comes to mind are fitness classes, stress management, smoking cessation, back care, and other activities. But this is just one side of health promotion. The other side, and just or even more important, is the work environment itself, which can either promote good health or be a variable in poor health.

There are many work conditions that either lead to or exacerbate employee health problems. Just providing a noon hour presentation on stress does not serve employees or the organization well if the workplace environment is unhealthy. There is a need to look more broadly at the psychosocial factors in the workplace with a willingness to look at leadership and the degree to which management supports clear direction, expectations, and resources to help create a healthy workplace.

Illnesses can arise out of poor management through a work climate characterized by conflict, lack of influence and clarity, constant overload, lack of support, disrespect, threats, and so forth. Add these elements into today's times where many workplaces are experiencing understaffing and overwork, and the stage is ripe for employees to develop physical or mental health issues.

Survey findings from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health support this by reporting that when employees work under psychosocial conditions of *high demand* (having too much to do in too short a time over too long a period), *low control* (not having enough influence over the way one's job is done), *high effort* (having to expend too

much mental energy over too long a period) and *low reward* (not receiving adequate feedback on performance, acknowledgement for work well-done, and recognition) they are:

- 2 times more likely to contract heart problems
- 3 times more likely to suffer back pain
- 5 times more likely to suffer certain cancers
- 2 – 3 times more likely to have conflicts
- 2 – 3 times more likely to suffer mental health problems
- 2 – 3 times more likely to experience infections
- 2 – 3 times more likely to experience injuries
- 2 times more likely to have substance abuse

In Human Solutions' 2008 Annual Report entitled *A Quiet Crisis: The Business Case for Managing Employee Mental Health*, the author reports that many studies show that well-structured organizational approaches to improving mental and physical health generate effects that are stronger and longer lasting than interventions delivered at the individual level. These organizational approaches seek to remove work-related practices and behaviors that contribute to employee stress and mental health conditions.

Additionally, the 2002 Conference Board of Canada report entitled *Health Promotion Programs at Work: A Frivolous Cost or a Sound Investment?* stated that employers who engage in health promotion, along with initiatives toward improving psychosocial and physical work environments, saw results in overall healthcare cost savings, improved productivity and better employee retention.

Researcher Dr. Julian Barling of Queens University has identified ten key organizational elements of a psychologically healthy workplace:

Transformational Leadership: A management style that offers motivation, stimulation, and individual consideration to employees. The leader must be able to demonstrate

Healthy Workplace (from page 3)

effective relationship building and communication skills in order to achieve the result of getting the work done through others. Effective leadership is strongly associated with well-being and work productivity.

Work and Pace: Workload that is appropriate to the employee's skill level, allows time for recovery from demanding tasks, and provides direction around how to complete the tasks.

Work Schedule: Work schedules that fit work/life needs and allow a level of control over the scheduling of the work.

Role Clarity: This concerns how well the employee's job is defined and the degree to which an employee has control and clarity over how to perform the work.

Job Future: This involves perceptions around the employee's job continuing into the future in a stable manner and that there is a realistic opportunity for career advancement.

Autonomy: Employees need to know that they have some individual choice over significant components of their work and they can use personal knowledge and skills to best accomplish tasks.

Workplace Justice: This involves employees perceiving that they are being treated fairly from management and coworkers.

Reduced Status Distinctions: The company culture does not have a distinct hierarchy among employees at different levels of the company.

Social Environment: Employees prefer to have social relationships at work and satisfaction with interpersonal aspects of the work environment.

Extrinsic Factors: This involves the basic physical comfort such as noise, temperature, office space, etc. and that employees have control over these.

The bottom line, according to researcher Dr. Jean-Pierre Brun of Laval University, is that individual managers can make an enormous difference. The manager who listens well, gives credit where credit is due, encourages a range of diversity on the team, rewards team and individual efforts, develops and supports everyone's confidence

during challenging times, and shows interest in the welfare, learning and advancement of employees is far more likely to create a higher level of health as well as productivity.

This is also supported in a study by researchers Dr. Linda Duxbury, Carleton University, and Chris Higgins, University of Western Ontario, where they report that employees with supportive supervisors have higher job satisfaction, trust of managers, commitment to the organization, and less role overload, job stress, depression, poor health, work-life balance issues, fatigue, absenteeism, and intention to leave the organization.

Many leaders may support this data and see the value in the assertions but may lack the skills, time, or energy to change their own behavior. Sometimes, when changing behavior, the hardest part is knowing where to start. The Sand Creek Group is a resource for leaders who would like to take a look at their individual behavior management and team management skills and begin to look at areas of development.

**Adapted from: "Workplace health promotion: The importance of including health-producing management practices". Vitality: EFAP Newsletter. Winter 2007. Human Solutions.*



Dear Sandy,

I can't stand it any more! I have a coworker who is constantly bad mouthing everyone in the office. I just found out this morning that she spread information

about my personal life (all of which was untrue) to my coworkers. I am livid. I work hard at being professional and helpful. Now I fear my coworkers will have a

negative image of me. How do I get this coworker to stop her hurtful gossiping?

Sincerely,
Get Her to Stop, Please!

Dear Get Her to Stop, Please!,

I'm sorry to hear this has happened. Addressing someone's choice to engage in gossip can sometimes feel daunting as we don't always know what the person is getting out of that behavior. Are they trying to get power, draw attention to themselves, or are they trying to undermine or get back at someone? What we know for sure is that the impact of gossip can be quite damaging; it can be hurtful, breaks trust, lowers morale, and can sometimes be embarrassing.

One approach that could be taken in your situation is to talk with your coworker directly. What I'd recommend is to find a time to talk with your coworker when neither of you will have distractions. Let her know you have something important to talk with her about and that you appreciate her finding the time to have this discussion.

Next, specifically convey the information you have

about personal (and inaccurate) information being spread about you and that you have knowledge that she is the one who spread such information. Then let her know that, if this is what happened, you want this behavior to stop because it has a negative impact on you and your working relationship with her.

If you feel comfortable, you can share specifically how the gossip negatively affects you. You could convey that it breaks your trust, leaves you feeling betrayed, hurt or angry and so forth. You can also fold into the conversation that if she does have questions or comments about you in the future, you would like her to come to you directly versus going to your coworkers. You may want to ask her if there is something on your part that has kept her from coming to you directly. If the behavior continues after this conversation, it is important to take the situation to your

supervisor.

Trying to get someone to change his or her behavior is challenging. A person usually doesn't change until they see a compelling reason why they should change or they see more benefit than cost in making the change. Your coworker may not see the damage she's doing by gossiping; she may only be experiencing what she feels are the positive aspects where she gets attention, feels she has power, feels "in the know" and so forth. Your role in talking with your coworker is to give her information that will lead her to consider making a change.

For more information and strategies about addressing gossip or other difficult behaviors in the workplace, please contact your Employee Assistance Program for confidential counseling and consultation.



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Responsive.

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We're on the Web!
www.sandcreekeap.com

Check Out Our New Website!

Looking for more information about your Employee Assistance Program? Check out Sand Creek's new and improved website at www.sandcreekeap.com.

The website has undergone a major face lift. Not only is the look different, but the site

was built for easier access to online materials and services.

As always, The Sand Paper and other promotional materials like brochures and posters are available. Soon, separate articles from the Sand Paper will be searchable by topic.

Feel free to contact us via email or phone if you have any other suggestions for our new site. We invite you to check it out and tell us what you think.

Contact Kristin Irwin at Kristin@sandcreekeap.com with any questions.

About Our Organization

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential assessment, short-term counseling, referral, and follow up. Professional counselors are experienced in helping people identify and find solutions to personal issues such as:

- Relationships
- Parent/Child Issues
- Substance Abuse
- Gambling
- Loss and Grief
- Financial Concerns
- Depression
- Job Stress
- Childcare or Eldercare
- Other Life Concerns

Sand Creek EAP is your program. It's completely confidential, provided at no cost to you, and is available to both you and your household family members. When you need help with personal concerns, we're the place to turn.

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