Breaking the gossip cycle

You don’t want to gossip but, at the same time, you don’t want to be gossiped about, so you simply listen and nod. But by listening, you’re still supporting and promoting gossip. The more people listen, the more likely others are to tell you the latest “dirt”. If you don’t listen, the gossip has nowhere to go.



Here’s how to get out of the gossip pipeline:

Be busy. Gossips want attention. If you're preoccupied with your work, you can't be available to listen to their latest story.

Don’t participate. Don’t give visual clues that you’re interested in listening. If someone passes a juicy story on to you, don't pass it any further. Take personal responsibility to act with integrity.

- **Turn it around by saying something positive.** It isn't nearly as much fun to spread negative news if it's spoiled by a complimentary phrase about the person being attacked.
- **Avoid the gossiper.** If you notice one person who consistently makes trouble, take the necessary actions to have as little interaction with that person as possible.
- **Keep your private life private.** Don't trust personal information with co-workers. Remember, if someone is gossiping about others, he or she will gossip about you too.
- **Choose your friends wisely at work.** Share information sparingly until you’re sure that you have built up a level of trust. Also, close association with gossipers will give the perception that you are also a gossiper.

If you feel certain gossip has crossed a moral line and is becoming harassment, speak to your manager or go to your Human Resources department. A company interested in a healthy work environment will not tolerate workplace gossip or harassment and will take action.

Responses to unwelcome gossip

It’s important not to feed the gossip with curiosity, agreement and further questions. It’s best to simply change the subject. Here are some other possible responses:

- I notice that you talk about Jane a lot. I’m curious why she interests you so much?
- Let’s take a look at it from Jane’s side.
- I am more interested in what *you’re* up to.
- Let’s talk about something more positive or decide what we’re going to do this afternoon.
- I feel uncomfortable listening to negative judgments about people unless we figure out how to help them.

If you are the victim of toxic gossip

First, remember that it can be easy to misunderstand what you hear, so make sure that the person is talking negatively about you and not someone with the same first name or a project you may be involved with.

If you’re certain you are the target of negative comments, resist the urge to snap back or sulk. Ignoring what you heard isn’t the solution either because it will be difficult to continue treating the instigator as a professional. If you do nothing, every time you work with that person you will remember their disparaging comments, and feel more resentful.

It’s best to deal with the perpetrator directly. Inform him or her that you are aware of what is being said behind your back. Do not get defensive, angry or aggressive. Just focus on getting the facts straight and

removing any implied innuendo. While you are not obliged to provide any details or facts, letting them know the truth can often help. Tell them that you regard gossiping as dishonest and disrespectful.

A last thought

Some offices can feel more like an episode of *Gossip Girl* than a place of business. While it's easy to get drawn into workplace drama, keep in mind that if you indulge in gossip, you may develop an office gossip reputation of your own. Instead, focus on accomplishing your own professional goals. When it comes to your job, wearing blinders to keep you from being distracted by gossip and unprofessional behaviour can only help your chances of success.