

# Avoid the Gossip Trap

By John B. McHugh

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Rumors will always swirl around a workplace and manifest themselves as gossip. Whether or not these rumors are true is one thing but, invariably, such rumors will be exaggerated. One basic rule that applies to rumors is this: try to avoid listening to nasty rumors and NEVER spread them yourself. Avoid gossip, as most likely it is malicious and, probably, not true. Plus, gossiping is highly unprofessional and can lead to a demoralizing culture at your workplace.

The second rule about gossip is this: be very careful what you say at any alcohol-fueled company event. You will hear colleagues with alcohol-loosened tongues saying things that could harm themselves or other colleagues. Get away from such colleagues as soon as possible. It's wise to avoid alcohol at company-sponsored events, even if you are a moderate drinker.

If the peer pressure is strong to drink, you can try a couple of techniques to make it look like you are part of the spirit of the event. For example, order a drink you don't like. If you love vodka and hate gin, order a gin and tonic. Carry it around with you, knowing that you won't even take a sip. Those around you will assume you're drinking it even if they don't see you doing so. Another tip is to order a tonic and lime or soda and lime but ask the bartender to make it look like a cocktail, rather than a nonalcoholic drink. That will keep you hydrated but not let your inhibitions down.

My final rule: Never share anything negative about yourself, your health, your finances, or your family. This information could be spun into negative rumor. It's nobody's business but your own. Sharing your personal information could morph into gossip that could harm your career.

This advice is as true for social media as it is for in-person conversations. For example, if a hiring manager is trying to decide who to hire among three candidates, seeing social media posts about a candidate's or their family member's serious illness may give them pause. If they were to hire that person, would they be absent and/or distracted by the illness?

Another new trend is that Gen Zs tend to be open about their salaries. This can make the older generation uncomfortable, as that was not a topic that was discussed in the workplace in the past. If a coworker shares their salary information with you, keep that knowledge to yourself.

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