



## Can Gossip in the Workplace be Positive?

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If you say the word “gossip” this usually carries negative connotations. A person who is considered “a gossip” is often frowned upon, looked down on, or otherwise seen in a negative manner. That person is regarded as not to be trusted, someone that will stab you in the back, and as a toxic influence in most circumstances. In this article, I want to argue for the positive power of gossip. Gossip can have an incredibly negative and toxic impact in a work environment, but it can also have a positive impact.

### What is Positive Gossip?

Positive gossip is when information that could benefit a person or that results in people developing a positive view of that person is shared. Positive gossip involves sharing in people’s accomplishments and celebrating their achievements with them and with others. When researchers consider ‘positive gossip,’ they concern themselves with prosocial behavioural responses. For example, if a person shares information that helps the group avoid the adverse effects of a norm-violating peer, then this is a form of positive gossip. It is also positive when a person witnesses the norm-violation and shares the outcome because this can help others correct their behaviour.

### Effects of Positive Gossip

Positive gossip can enhance work

environments. It can build trust and increase team cohesiveness. A lot of this can be traced back to the mantra of “praise in public, critique in private.” When employees are conditioned to expect their coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates to speak about them positively when talking to others, this builds trust and morale. When employees are conditioned to expect the opposite, it destroys morale, fosters mistrust, and leads to toxicity.

Positive gossip also builds positive relationships beyond the team or working unit. If a team has a reputation for only speaking positively about each other and their work, others learn to trust that unit and it fosters an impression that the work completed by that unit is good. In short, positive gossip can help build a positive reputation for a team.

Positive gossip can also turn into an excellent recruitment tool. Most people want to work for a place that they hear positive comments about. If I hear that a team does great work, the team environment is strong, everyone on the team carries their weight, they all get along and like each other. The word of mouth can serve to attract others to join the team. It also tends to attract others who want to work in and contribute to a positive environment.

Recruiting in the workplace is incredibly challenging in the current economy. Many people are getting competing offers — particularly those with the highest qualifications. One way to set your team apart is through fostering positive word of mouth beyond the team. This will also cause those who move on to better opportunities to reflect on their time with the employer and unit in a positive manner. Word of mouth matters in the recruitment and retention of employees.

### Positive Gossip vs Negative Gossip

To shut down the negative gossip, you need to make it clear that this behaviour is not tolerated in the workplace. Some places create policies that prohibit gossip. The best way to kill negative gossip is by providing a positive example and creating a positive and prosocial environment in the workplace.

Toxic work environments are notorious for negative gossip. If you have a toxic work environment or suspect that you have one, the first step is to address the problems causing the toxicity. Make sure that the supervision structures are used properly. Look out for “bad” managers and supervisors. Managers and supervisors who want to be everyone’s friend but who do not hold people accountable for good

work and good behaviour can promote negative gossip.

Reward people for good work. Speak positively when talking about people or your work environment to others. If what you are going to say about the other person is negative, reconsider saying it. Think about the impact of your words on morale and behaviour at work.

Be cautious of people who negatively gossip to you. Always remember that if they are willing to talk negatively to you, they are also likely to talk negatively about you. Be careful what information you trust a negative gossip with.

Track how much of your work time is spent talking about others or complaining or listening to others talk negatively or complain. Take it upon yourself to save the organization money by telling people who are known for negative talk and negative energy costs that you need to get your work done, but you would love to talk to them after work.

Positive gossip includes prosocial behaviours that increase group cooperation and decrease selfishness. Gossip strengthens social bonds and helps to resolve conflicts. It informs us about social norms. Not all gossip causes harm, and most of the time, it is neutral.



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