

## **Difficult Relationships**

You have been enjoying your endeavours and working well enough for your boss to be pleased with you. As a result you are enjoying some success with a rising profile in the office. Unfortunately, you find out that a workmate who was previously friendly with you is sabotaging you by speaking about you behind your back and making you look bad. It seems that person is jealous and is trying to make herself look better by making you look bad. As a result you are now the target of resentment from some of your colleagues and your professional credibility is being undermined.

All the gossip behind your back is making it very difficult for you to do your job unhindered but worse than that is the knowledge that you are being unfairly targeted and that what is being said is nothing but lies. It makes your days in the office untenable and your stress levels have gone through the roof. You are not sleeping and so every day you lack energy and you continually feel ill about going to work because of your anxiety. Like most targets your confidence has suffered and you are having panic attacks. You also catch yourself being irritable with work colleagues and you are finding it hard to concentrate. As a result your work commitment has suffered and you are no longer enjoying life. Something has to be done, but what?

You have a choice. You can give in to your feelings, remain on your guard each day and become an emotional wreck which may lead to you having to find another job or you can confront the situation and react in a positive way to your workmates. You should not allow antagonistic and jealous workmates to bring you down and keep you from enjoying your job. More especially, you cannot afford to allow them to jeopardise your opportunities for advancement. However, it won't help your credibility if you become angry and demand loudly to know of everyone in the office what is going on behind your back.

If you choose the former option your stress levels will make it impossible to enjoy your job and, indeed, to carry out that job at an optimal level. Not only that, but when you allow stress to take hold it will also have an effect in your personal life, affecting your relationship with family and friends outside the office environment. Stress, at the very least can be unwelcome and unhelpful and at its worst it can be quite debilitating because of its demand upon the capacities of both your mind and your body. It is well to remember that it isn't so much the events that determine whether you are stressed or not, it is your reaction to those events.

Thus, you have within you the capacity to decide whether you will allow stress to win or whether you can use stress to your advantage. You can use it to your advantage by choosing an attitude of "So what! – These misunderstandings have arisen so what can I do about them to bring about a good result?" Remember that your thoughts and feelings have a direct impact on your results. It will be necessary to be optimistic in the face of your difficulties and shift your perspective by changing your internal mindset so that you can come through the difficult situation. By maintaining in yourself and directing your

thoughts toward a good result, you will be able to find a solution to allow better relations between you and your workmates.

Once you have your mind right, it is time to take action. Learning how to deal with difficult workmates can be very tough. You may not like confrontation and try to avoid it but it is necessary that the situation is addressed and dealt with effectively. Once you resolve the problem you will feel so much better about yourself and your work environment because you may be able to find common ground towards a positive working relationship. When it is all over you will be able to get your career back on track and you will have grown on both a professional and personal level.

At this point it is a good to take some practical steps to deal with the situation. First of all you could sit down and write out all the positive attributes of your co-worker. You will need to be objective in your appraisal and include what value you think your workmate brings to the company. Then write down how this person affects you and your job in a negative fashion. Again, try to be objective. Next, write down a list of possible scenarios about how you could and should handle the situation.

Now write down how you are interacting with this person and, perhaps, when the back-biting actions began to take place. Did anything happen to give the person a reason to begin gossiping about you? Perhaps she thought you were getting too popular with management? Remember there are always two sides to these matters and there may have been unhelpful reactions from you to her. This situation has obviously negatively affected the workplace, so be honest with yourself and look for a way to objectively solve the situation.

Your decision now is about whether you need to discuss the situation with your manager or whether you will be able to speak directly with the person involved. Managers are busy people and don't like being drawn into staff disagreements unless absolutely necessary. If possible, therefore, you should be able to discuss the matter with the person directly and the best way to do this is to speak to her calmly and in private. It is important that you are composed and unemotional. The conversation could be as follows:

- Share with her the positive qualities you feel she possesses and show appreciation for them.
- If you are sure she is the initiator of the gossip and rumours you can explain to her that you have heard that she started a rumour which is untrue and hurtful.
- Mention the problems that have arisen with other co-workers because of the gossip and tell her that you would like to work through the difficulties to improve your working relationship.
- There may be valid reasons that led her to do what she did. Don't take exception to what is said and don't get down to her level if she is rude.
- Keep the conversation about the situation – never move to a personal level and don't become emotional, just stick to the facts and be professional.
- Let her respond to what you say and listen carefully to what she has to say.

- The person may become quite defensive about their gossip and lies and you may have to sit through her telling you what she doesn't like about you or about how you do things but it is important that you listen carefully.
- On the other hand most people feel guilty and she may apologise and claim it is all a misunderstanding.
- Remember, she has been gossiping so your conversation will probably be transmitted to the rest of her office friends.
- Communicate with her gently and identify positive ways that you can work together.
- Ask politely but firmly that she stop her behaviour immediately.

If your meeting doesn't achieve any positive results, or if you were unable to gain a meeting with the person in question, it will probably become necessary to speak to your manager. Make an appointment for as soon as the boss is available and when you meet with him explain the problem in a rational and professional manner. Take your notes in with you because they will help you stay on track. Your boss may wish to deal with the situation himself or he may organise a three-way meeting to solve the issue.

The point is that you can give in to stress or you can positively and sensitively deal with the situation. When you have done all you can do, it is up to management to help you.

It may also be wise to do all you can to reconnect with your other co-workers in the office. Take time when you are at morning or afternoon tea to speak with people and ask them about what they are doing in their lives. Don't try to second-guess what they are thinking about you. Instead be cheerful and natural and take a real interest in them. You may be surprised at how positive their reaction is in return.

You have made it clear to everyone that you expect respect and that you want a positive work atmosphere. If you have tried your utmost and still the gossip continues you may need to use your very last resort and take up a new job, either in another department or with another firm. However, it is always to your advantage to do your best to sort out the problems and have everyone understand the truth of the matter. Most people want to get on with others and if you have been open and professional in your actions you are more likely to reach a positive and successful conclusion to the issue.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them."

Take on this saying as your own by writing it down and putting it up somewhere you will see it often. Every time you see it, say it out loud and eventually it will become part of you. You will then have a good chance of changing your life for the better.