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worldwide  
magazine  
January/February 2009

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## BEST PRACTICES

# I Heard a Rumor – Dare to Eliminate Gossip

## Once upon a time —

in ancient Greece (469–399 BC), Socrates was widely lauded for his wisdom.

One day the great philosopher came upon an acquaintance, who ran up to him excitedly and said, “Socrates, do you know what I just heard about one of your students...?”

“Wait a moment,” Socrates replied. “Before you tell me, I’d like you to pass a little test. It’s called the Test of Three.”

“Test of Three?”

“That’s correct,” Socrates continued. “Before you talk to me about my student let’s take a moment to test what you’re going to say. The first test is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”

“No,” the man replied, “actually I just heard about it.”

“All right,” said Socrates. “So you don’t really know if it’s true or not. Now let’s try the second test, the test of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my student something good?”

“No, on the contrary...”

“So,” Socrates continued, “you want to tell me something bad about him even though you’re not certain it’s true?”

The man shrugged, a little embarrassed.

Socrates continued, “You may still pass though because there is a third test — the filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my student going to be useful to me?”

“No, not really...”

“Well,” concluded Socrates, “if what you want to tell me is neither True nor Good nor even Useful, why tell it to me at all?”



## How can this story support you?

One of the most common goals I see with clients is that they want to create a more open, productive and responsive environment, in their lives and organizations.

### Guess what?

This month’s DARE is to eliminate gossip (aka hearsay, rumors, etc.) in your life and workplace for at least ONE WEEK. (Double dare: make it a whole month.) No kidding, any form of gossip, collusion or making assumptions, ditch it!

Sound silly? I know. Gossip is something we’d all like to think has been left in the good ole days of high school. Yet, it still happens. It happens all the time. Sometimes in obvious active ways, sometimes more passively. We may not like to talk about it. But it happens and it has an impact. So in service of creating clean relationships, open communication and simply happier lives, in service of creating the most open, joyful, productive and responsive environments possible, let’s play with this one. Because imagine the energy and feeling of a gossip-free environment where people engage with people directly and focus on helping things go right.

You know what gossip and assumptions generally look like. And, here are 10 things you can start doing TODAY to support yourself (and your team, friends, organization, etc.) Pick the one(s) that resonate most for you:

- 1** Simply stop. Make a pact with yourself to engage in no more gossip.
- 2** Make an agreement. Engage your spouse, friends, work team, etc. to not participate in it. (Some companies have even created “no gossip” policies to help with this.) Want extra buy in? Make it fun!
- 3** See a colleague “going down in flames?” Ask “How can I best support this person right now? How can I help things go right?” instead of getting involved in the frenzy (even mentally).
- 4** Clear assumptions directly with the source of question (vs. making assumptions).
- 5** Hold and respect confidentiality. (Repeating stories or information that should not be repeated is a direct line to gossip central, no good will come of it.)
- 6** Stick with the facts, just the facts. (No need to interpret or put your “story” into the situation. Interpreting and repeating stories creates drama. Even if not “officially confidential” it’s a sure-fire recipe for gossip.)
- 7** Dare to directly engage. Upset about something? Feel misunderstood, wronged, or even failed? Engage directly with the source of “conflict.” (Instead of going through third-party conversations and making stuff up. You can’t possibly know what’s going on for sure until you check in with the other person directly — and you’ll often be surprised at what’s really going on “over there”.)
- 8** Seek to understand and then to be understood. Hear their point, make sure you understand it, share yours and then work through it together. (Instead of gathering allies to support your point of view in service of making you right and the other wrong.)



- 9** Clarify communication that is unclear or seems "off". (Instead of making stuff up when communication is not clear.)
- 10** Stop it in its tracks. See "gossip", "hearsay", "assumptions", "making stuff up", "collusion", or any of the other close cousins convening around you? You have several options: Walk away. Name it when you see it. Request that it stop. OR take it a productive step further asking "Is it true? Is it good? Is it useful? Is it any of my business? (Usually not.) And how can I help things go right here?" (It's usually as simple as stopping it, although depending on the depth, you may have some "clean up" to do.) BTW, you can do all of this in a way that is kind and non-intimidating. An even better way to set this up is to have a "no gossip" rule that's co-designed as a group. That way you can help each other remember. Because it's so easy to forget.
- 11** BONUS: Remember that we are all human beings and that you too can be on the other end of gossip at any time. What's the impact gossip, or unproductive, silly or hurtful chatter, has on you, your productivity, your spirit, your ability to swing out? Consider that and "be the change you wish to see".

**Imagine the impact of doing any of these for a whole month!** Pick even ONE of these to tackle and you will experience a shift. At first you'll simply feel better; cleaner and clearer. And then you'll begin to notice the impact on others. Do it on your own, or even better, get your whole team or workplace involved, but try it. You'll like it. (And it'll save you time, money and energy. Who wouldn't want that?)

**One last thought: Remember that gossip comes in many forms (some quite sneaky)!** So even if you feel you stay away from it, here's another place to look. Check in with what assumptions you make about people (what they do, what they think), as well as situations and circumstances, and see how that shows up for you. I've found that we can all use a bit of an "assumption reality check" from time to time. And I've also found that these "reality checks" can save relationships and peace of mind. (BTW, It doesn't have to be external gossip to be toxic, internal dialogue can have a negative impact too.)

**Simply put: Boycott Gossip. Boycott assumptions.** (And if that feels "hard", just notice what the impact is of both, on yourself and others: Does it help? Where does it hold you back? Where does it serve? Where does it hurt?) ▲

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Anese Cavanaugh, founder of Dare To Engage, is devoted to helping forward thinking business leaders become revered leaders in business and life while they build a more authentically engaged workforce, retain top talent and support personal sustainability throughout their organizations. With degrees and credentials in the areas of kinesiology, leadership development, productivity, coaching and wellness, Anese brings a fresh perspective to experiential leadership training and fully engaged living, celebrating and honoring the hero within each person. For more about Anese or the Dare To Engage Programs, go to DareToEngage.com.

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