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### What is the Price of Workplace Gossip, and How Can I Help Stop It?

By Sharon Womack Doty, Esq. The AGOS Group, LLC

Everyone knows about the workplace "grapevine." Managers spend valuable time dealing with gossip, rumors, half-truths, and employees' reactions to "stories" they've heard. The price of gossip in the workplace is substantial and includes:

#### Loss of productivity

- Gossiping takes time — time originally intended for work assignments — time for which the employee is being paid to accomplish work-related assignments.
- Upset caused by employees' reactions to gossip, rumors, and half-truths diverts attention and focus away from the work at hand and inhibits both creativity and work production.
- Gossip, rumors, half-truths, and speculation promote an ongoing cycle of more gossip, rumors, half-truths, and speculation. It may seem as though employees are spending more time dealing with gossip and rumors than on the work for which they were hired.

#### Undermining Teamwork

- Gossip chips away at the trust between team members, damages the ability of team members to rely on each other, and encourages negative speculation about coworkers.
- Gossip, rumors, and half-truths can result in team members holding back in discussions or stockpiling ideas in an effort to protect their respective and individual interests.

Eliminating gossip from our environment is simple, but not easy. There is one rule that managers and employees can adopt that will stop 99 percent of the gossip in the workplace. You must, however, be willing to make a genuine commitment to follow this rule:

***Make a commitment to stop listening to complaints that you can't do anything about and to conversations that don't directly affect you.***

Gossip and rumors start with a complaint about something or someone or a conversation about a person or issue that doesn't directly affect you. Complaining is almost a national pastime in this country. We complain about everything from the weather to the price of gasoline. We complain to almost anyone who will listen—and the problem is that so many people are willing to listen that the complaint grows and festers and takes on a life of its own.

A commitment to stop listening to complaints you can't do anything about and conversations that don't directly affect you can have several positive effects:

- People learn to stop dumping their complaints and concerns on your doorstep.
- Nobody is wasting precious time wondering and worrying about things they can't do anything about.
- Reputations are not destroyed by innuendo and half-truths.
- There is no time and energy wasted on feeling guilty about participating in gossip or spreading rumors.
- Nobody has to spend time cleaning up the organization's reputation and damage to individuals—damage caused by gossip, rumors, and half-truths.
- The organization's human resources are properly focused on the continuing development and improvement of the organization's effectiveness.