

## Good Gossip, Bad Gossip

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At its best, good gossip is important for emotional health and growth. Good gossip is the place where we can fully express whatever is on our minds or in our hearts. Good gossip is a sign that we have a relationship that is trustworthy and safe. There is nothing like a no-holds barred gossip with a good friend.

In fact, when I went and looked up “gossip” in a dictionary, I discovered that it comes from combining the words “god + sibb” – a god-sibling, crony, or companion. In other words, a good friend, a soul mate.

However, as we all know bad gossip, especially in social networks like work or church, can be highly toxic and destructive. Sometimes organizations try to ban or discourage gossip. But that is impossible. We all need good friends, and good friends – by definition – gossip. What every organization needs is clarity about the differences between good gossip and bad gossip, and commitment to encouraging good gossip and discouraging bad gossip.

To help start that conversation, here is my list of the differences between good gossip and bad gossip.

Good Gossip increases ...	Bad Gossip increases ...
<b>Clarity:</b> What did I personally see and hear. What was actually said and done.	<b>Rumours:</b> What did nameless others say and do. What have others passed on about what others have said and done
<b>Self-understanding:</b> How I felt then, what I feel now. What are my thoughts; my needs; my desires; my fears; my responses; etc.	<b>Suspicious:</b> Guessing about other people's motives, feelings, thoughts, and character.
<b>Personal Responsibility:</b> What I did, or did not do. What I will do, or won't do. How I will deal with my feelings.	<b>Blaming:</b> What others need to do; How others need to change.
<b>Reconciliation:</b> Understanding how others are actually feeling and thinking. Negotiates what can be changed. Deals with what cannot be changed.	<b>Divisions:</b> Exaggerates and fixates on other people's faults and short-comings. Re-enforces negative feelings. Demands impossible changes; makes false promises.
<b>Transparency:</b> Follows up with others who have been talked about in ways that are safe and constructive. Understands and shares openly what needs to be known publicly. Keeps confidential what is truly personal.	<b>Secrets:</b> Never talks directly to others being talked about. Shares personal information that should be kept confidential. Doesn't share information that others need to function well within the organization.

## How to Change Bad Gossip into Good Gossip

Declare publicly that from now on you will ...

1. Never talk about nameless others, even if you have to do something rude to stop the conversation.
2. Never keep secrets. If the conversation is about church matters, always follow up with the person being gossiped about.
3. Always seek to clarify and be responsible for your own thoughts, feelings, desires, needs, etc.

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4. Never speculate about other people's thoughts, feelings, desires, needs, etc. without asking them directly.
5. Recognize that no one is perfect. If someone's imperfections are endangering the organization, the organization needs to address that concern. But if the organization can only survive if everyone is perfect, then that is what needs to be addressed.
6. Recognize that some things cannot be changed. For example, no one can change someone else's personality. What can be changed is your response to someone else's personality.
7. Recognize that some things cannot be promised. No one can promise that mistakes will never happen; that the world will always be totally just; that changes will never happen unless we all agree; that decisions will not be made if someone gets angry, cries, or threatens to quit.
8. Never be held hostage by other people's bad behaviour. Always keep asking for clarity and expressing your own thoughts, feelings, needs, etc.
9. Know and respect the difference between information that is truly personal and needs to be kept confidential, and information that is about the organization and needs to be shared openly.
10. Life is full of uncertainties and hurts. Our feelings about these are real: stress, anxiety, anger, fear, pain, sorrow, disappointment, frustration. To grow and mature spiritually and emotionally means we live through and learn from these difficult feelings. We do not get stuck or blocked by these difficult feelings in ourselves or others.
11. Find and enjoy the company of trusted friends with whom you can have a good gossip.

## Some Things Not to Do

1. Don't make this a company rule. Encourage good gossip, yes. Make it a law, no. Making it a law is trying to change other people's personalities, see Point 6 above.
2. Don't make it retroactive. Maybe you've been bad gossiping yourself and someone has told you something that someone else has said that really makes you mad. Now you know why bad gossiping is bad, but it is unfair to change the rules mid-stream. Resolve that from this point forward you will only good gossip, say that publicly, do it, and you'll change the world.
3. Say publicly, and say it often, how you will respond when others want to gossip with you. Don't just make this a "personal thing." You are changing a pattern in your relationships with others. They need to be told ahead of time what to expect.
4. Don't good gossip with people you don't like and bad gossip with your friends. Your behaviour has to be consistent if you really want to make a difference.

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[www.evokingchange.blogspot.com](http://www.evokingchange.blogspot.com).