

Work Daze: Gossip girl meets gossip boy

by *Bob_Goldman*

Have you watched the hot new TV show, "Gossip Girl"? I haven't watched it, but I am living it. Ask me what the most important product our company produces and I will tell you flat-out - it's gossip. Our services are slack and our merchandise is morbid, but when it comes to turning out high-grade, A-plus No. 1 gossip, no one can touch us.

If you also work for a company that is the Tiffany's of gossip, I hope you are enjoying every juicy rumor and scandalous innuendo. Because, believe it or don't, there is a group of people out there who want to take away the very lifeblood of office life. That's right, thanks to the efforts of these funless, clueless party poopers, companies all over America are shutting down the gossip mill.

There's a name for the people behind the anti-gossip movement. They're called consultants. The leader of the button-your-lip pack seems to be April Callis of Springboard Consulting, the inventor and purveyor of a half-day workshop called Gossip Stoppers. According to an article in Time magazine, Callis "delivers analysis of gossip's causes and destructive potential, along with tips for improvement. She focuses on creating solutions rather than assigning blame, and she makes listeners responsible for stopping rumors by refusing to pass them on."

Now I'm all for creating solutions, but I don't see how you stop gossip by refusing to pass on rumors. After all, if gossip mongers like thee and me suddenly cease and desist when it comes to spouting in the hallways and byways of our companies, everyone will get suspicious and that will start even more rumors, only this time, the rumors will be about us! Also, if you cut off air supply to a particularly rancid rumor, it could die before everyone in the office hears about it. And that would just be a shame.

Remember our slogan: a slimy, underhanded, totally untrue rumor is a terrible thing to waste.

If you think an anti-gossip seminar from Callis would be a dry and dreary affair, think again. According to the Time article, "Gossip Stoppers kits include paper clips to remind rumormongers to fasten those loose lips and breath mints to help them remember to sweeten what they say."

There is also a charming button with the international "NO" signal superimposed on the word "Gossip." (You don't have to go a workshop to get all this booty. Gossip Stoppers kits are available online for peanuts. I'd give you more information, but that would be gossip.)

It's bad enough that the spoilsports are trying to take away our natural right to gossip, they also expect us to hold positive feelings about our work, our workplace and our co-workers. At www.gossipstoppers.com, for

example, there is a quiz to determine whether or not you are working in a "negative office."

It's not challenging to take the quiz or to see through the meaning of certain answers. Or are you shocked and surprised that feeling "moody, focused and then bored" at work and spending your time to "complain and whine about work and co-workers" are considered to be signs of negativity?

I know you, feeling "moody, focused and bored" would represent an attitude adjustment worthy of a pound of Prozac. It's sure better than "depressed, psychotic and suicidal." As for complaining and whining - well, isn't that what made America great? Isn't it what made America, period? Think about it. If the Pilgrims didn't complain and whine about King George, we'd all be eating steak and kidney pie for Thanksgiving.

The one tenant of the positivity movement that I do embrace is the idea that all our backbiting and backstabbing is caused by the mutual back-scratching of management. "While the bosses are waiting for every department to sign off on a decision, leaks spring, and worried staff members start spinning," suggests Time writer Francine Russo. And April Callis agrees. "After so much downsizing," she says, "there are fewer employees left. They feel overworked, without control and in a negative spiral."

The solution to this situation is obvious. All of us worker bees must immediately start buzzing about management's sins, omissions and foibles. That way, the entire organization can come together in a totally positive way, expressing with one whispered voice, our complete contempt for our supervisors.

In fact, you won't believe what I heard about your manager. Stop working on that report and meet me in the break room. I'll tell you all about it.

Bob Goldman has been an advertising executive at a Fortune 500 company in the San Francisco Bay area. He offers a virtual shoulder to cry on at bob@funnybusiness.com.

Â© Copley News Service

Work Daze: Gossip girl meets gossip boy by Bob_Goldman