

Advice if we gossip

As we move into the cadence of summer, I have been reflecting on how we connect as a community.

Mark Twain is quoted as saying that “a lie will fly around the whole world while the truth is getting its boots on”

Like many colleagues I have spoken with on the subject, gossiping can be very destructive and cause conflict even if the gossipers do not intend to cause harm. Its impact still may.

Nevertheless, if certain guidelines are followed, gossip can be harmless. I refer to it as “good gossip”. It may surprise us, but gossip can even sometimes be beneficial. It can be a means by which we share information, build trust, and improve our relationships.

The main criterion for good gossip is that it needs to be conveyed respectfully in a manner not to cause any harm. It needs to be constructive, fact based and not based on mere speculation. Finally, its intent should be to foster support, collaboration and cohesiveness. It should not be done in a manner to disparage or spread false rumors about any individual.

As Ombuds, I have seen gossip used negatively and therefore creating conflict.

Gossip can be especially damaging in our academic institution since it destroys trust, one of our key core values. A value that is crucial for collaboration, learning and growth.

Harmful gossip will undermine trust as rumors and unfounded criticism of others spread. It creates an atmosphere of suspicion and insecurity, just the opposite of trust. Colleagues will become cautious about sharing ideas, information, seeking advice or learning from each other; not wanting to take the risk that their words will be taken out of context, altered, or simply put them in a bad light before their peers or before a wider audience. As we all know, it is extremely difficult to regain one’s reputation.

I have seen gossip contributing to a stressful work environment causing conflict, low morale and lower productivity. It creates detachment among colleagues, instead of collaboration, another Bentley core value.

We cannot deny that gossip is a natural behavior. However, it can be used for either good or bad. Let us choose it to connect, to build trust, and to share information. If we remember the guidelines for “good gossip” we will continue to foster a culture of respect, trust and collaboration.

I wish everyone a wonderful summer and look forward to seeing you on campus.

My warm regards, Eliane