

## Gossip Power In The Workplace: Good, Bad, & Ugly

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Gossip is talk and writing about people  
– both other people and ourselves –  
in family, social, workplace, and public settings.\*

\*Based on research by both men and women starting in the 1940s.

### Origin Of Gossip

Going back to the 1300s, the original form of the word gossip was “godsibb”. It brought together the words “god” and “sibb” to mean a close relationship through God. Godsibb identified people who were godparents or a good relation.

By the 1500s, godsibb relationships were between individuals such as male drinking partners and women gathered for a birth.

### Evolution Of Gossip

By the 1600s, “godsibb” had become “gossip”. Gossip began to mean idle talk between women.

By the 1900s gossip was considered exclusively talk by women. People accused men who gossiped of being women. Gossip meant trivial talk.

### Gossiping Men & Gossip Cells

In 1945, Carl Withers published *Plainville, USA*. His book reflects time he spent in a small Midwestern town. Withers found what he called “gossip cells”, people who grouped together by such characteristics as age, gender, occupation, and hobby. Some of the cells Withers found included:

- Old men
- Old women
- Young married women
- A “wild set”

Withers found that the biggest gossips were the old men. Art Gallaher, Jr. visited the town where Withers did his research. In his book, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later*, he came to the same conclusion that old men were the biggest gossips.

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Both Carl Withers and Art Gallaher, Jr. failed to recognize the reason the old men were the biggest gossips – they had time to gossip. At every stage of their lives, women face expectations that they take care of daily chores – cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, etc. Even old women face those expectations. Therefore, old women don't have the free time to gossip that old men have. The most striking example I know of comes from my childhood.

A minister and his wife lived next door to my family. The minister retired and spent his time gossiping. He expected his wife, Alice, to continue to do all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry by herself. Alice took in other people's laundry to help pay bills while her retired husband gossiped. The retired minister even prevented Alice from gossiping when he allowed her to leave the house. The minister would drive the two of them to a restaurant. The minister left his Alice in the car alone while he went inside the restaurant for pie, coffee, and gossip. Everyone in the neighborhood was relieved when the minister died first. Alice was able to enjoy a few years of doing what she wanted to do, including gossiping with friends.

The biggest gossips in any population are likely to be the people who have the time and opportunity to gossip.

### Gossip Power

Gossip power is in the relationships it creates. The type of gossip determines the type of relationship.

*Good gossip* opens doors in relationships to create connections. Those connections lead to unexpected benefits. Good gossip invites bystanders to open doors to you.

*Bad gossip* closes doors in relationships to erect barriers. Those barriers lead to betrayal and sabotage. Bad gossip invites bystanders to close doors to you.

*Ugly Gossip* slams doors in relationships to hurt, humiliate, and blame individuals and groups. Those slammed doors lead to revenge, backfires, even murder. Ugly gossip invites bystanders to slam doors to you.

Gossip power is amplified in gossip cells:

Good gossip cells

Bad gossip cells

Ugly gossip cells

Take a moment to think about the relationships and gossip cells that fit each type of gossip in your life.

### Three Factors For Successfully Opening Doors

I hope you now want to open doors in all of your relationships. Unfortunately, your desire to open doors does not guarantee open door success. Three factors determine the success of your good gossip efforts:

Situation  
Sincerity  
Open-mindedness

#### *Situation*

If a situation rewards bad and ugly gossip, good gossip will open only a few doors, if any. Examples include:

A small group of people controlling a situation for their own benefit.

Competition that rewards winning at any cost.

Manipulation to divide and conquer.

Which situations in your life reward bad and ugly gossip?

#### *Sincerity*

Sincerity is necessary for anyone to believe you are opening a door, especially if you had previously closed or slammed doors. Insincerity will convince people to close or slam their doors to you.

How many doors have you closed or slammed because of insincerity?

#### *Open-Mindedness*

The person you're opening a door to has to be open-minded enough to open their door to you. It's possible to pry a closed or slammed door open if you keep opening doors sincerely, but it will take time and repeated *moments of dignity*.

Open Doors Anyway

Keep open doors open.

When possible, limit contact with closed doors that stay closed.

When possible, walk away from slammed doors that will never open.

When you cannot choose to limit or walk away, focus on transforming your relationships with the bystanders in the same situation. Protect yourself by treating everyone with the same respectful words and behavior. Bystanders will see your respectful words and behavior. Many of them will appreciate it. Your behavior will give those people reasons to stand up for you when you need someone to stand up for you.

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Sparking Success Page

“Should I Stay? Should I Limit? Should I Go?”