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NEWS

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Note: Klaus will lead “soft serve” parties in select cities in conjunction with the book’s launch. Soft serve parties are an easy and fun way of serving up the soft skills so you don’t have to learn them the hard way. Klaus reveals essential but often-ignored soft skills lessons for the workplace interspersed with lively, experiential exercises. The program lasts about two hours—and, yes, soft serve ice cream tops off each event!

Does Your Workplace Have a CGO (Chief Gossip Officer)?

When it comes to gossip, learn the art of deflection.



“You’ve probably heard the whole song and dance when it comes to gossip at the office: It’s distracting, it’s counter productive, and it’s bad for business. But despite the ill effects of gossiping on the job, no workplace is immune—too many people find it irresistible on both the receiving and giving ends.

“While being aware of and understanding the political landscape is a must-have soft skill, gossiping isn’t really the kind of political skill that’s career elevating,” says Peggy Klaus in her new book *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills—Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They’d Learned Sooner* (Collins, February 1, 2008), which features 54 lessons that highlight how soft skills mastery is the key to hard success.

There are all sorts of explanations for why people gossip, such as they are insecure and building themselves up by tearing someone else down. Or, they are trying to entertain themselves on an otherwise boring day. Social anthropologists might tell you that gossiping is simply a part of human nature.

But Klaus says there’s another reason that goes to the heart of the matter: “Gossip is a way for people to bond and feel like they are part of the inner circle, that they are ‘in the know.’ It makes them feel special, particularly when they have a hot tidbit to share that no one else has heard yet. We start treating the news as a commodity, an asset that can raise our value and be traded on at the office. Voila! It makes us more of a player.”

The truth is that gossiping actually degrades us in the eyes of others. As Klaus points out, “Close your eyes. Think for a second about the CGO (Chief Gossip Officer) at your own workplace. Every company seems to have one—the busybody who always has the goods on everyone. Or maybe you’re lucky enough to have several of these folks in your office. If that’s the case, I doubt thinking about them makes a smile spread across your face.”

Indeed, in a 2007 study of the top three pet peeves found in the workplace (among those who have a biggest pet peeve) gossip ranked the highest at 60% followed by others' poor time management skills at 54% and messiness in communal spaces at 45%.

While most of us don't aspire to the title of CGO, we all struggle with how best to handle ourselves when confronted with gossip. Klaus says, "The best advice to follow is something your Mom probably already told you: Don't say anything behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face. Yes, it's always best to take the high ground, or as client of mine says, 'Clamp it shut!'"

So the next time your co-workers try drawing you into a gossip fest, practice the art of deflection to avoid participation without coming across with a holier-than-thou attitude. For example, Klaus advises, when someone asks, "Don't you think your boss Patricia blew it? She seems really distracted lately," you could respond in one of the following ways:

- "Have you shared your thoughts with Patricia?"
- "I don't really know about that."
- "Why not talk to her about your concerns?"
- "Patricia's been a great boss for me."

"One of the key ways to practice the art of deflection is to put the onus of resolving the issue raised by the gossiper back on them and stay positive, rather than joining in with your own take on the matter," says Klaus.

Visit www.peggyklaus.com for a complete synopsis of the latest soft skills research and for an online "Take 24" automated self-assessment quiz that tests and tallies an individual's soft skills savvy in a number of key arenas. People respond to 24 items online and receive instant feedback on which soft skills areas they need to improve, along with customized advice from Klaus.

About The Author



Peggy Klaus trains professionals world-wide at leading companies which include Credit Suisse, Disney, UNICEF, and Kaiser Permanente. Author of *BRAG! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It*, she has been featured in a wide range of media including the *Today Show*, *20/20*, *The Early Show*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the New York Times*, *Investors Business Daily*, *O Magazine*, *Working Mother*, *Pink*, *Glamour*, *Allure*, *Self*, *Woman's Day*, and *Family Circle*.

Klaus has lectured at Harvard; the University of California, Berkeley; and Wharton. She lives in Berkeley, CA.

The Hard Truth About Soft Skills— Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They'd Learned Sooner

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