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Keeping workplace gossip at bay

What do employees do when they take a break from work? Most often than not, the answer is – gossip. Harmless everyday gossip is inevitable and acceptable by all. But when gossip turns into a medium of spreading malicious rumours, we have a problem in hand. Controlling the grapevine is one of the most challenging duties for HR because it's almost impossible to detect the source

“Rumours are baseless, irrational and spread by unsatisfied employees within the organisation. It could be pertaining to increments, promotions, lay-offs, etc.,” says Prafullachandra Bhamare, HR manager, Neev Group of Companies. Dharmesh Mistry, vice president and chief talent officer, Ugam Solutions stresses on the fact that rumours are always ‘unverified’. “A rumour could be defined as an unverified piece of information which spreads through the informal employee network. Usually, the case might be that the rumour may be true but the information may not be complete or appropriately contextualised and hence, stands unreliable,” he explains.

Rumours can create tension and fear among employees leading to feelings of diminished job security. “Unverified, incomplete or partial information can create unnecessary panic or set incorrect expectations amongst employees. It harms the organisation in two ways; first, by the way of incorrect information causing it damage and second, by way of the additional efforts that would be needed from the management to undo the damage done by the unverified and incorrect information. The popular health adage, ‘prevention is



‘better than cure’ is equally applicable here too,” says Mistry. Bhamare feels that rumours can even lead to employees quitting the organisation. “Employees may lose their concentration and performance. They feel insecure and scared. It may lead to high attrition rates too. Employees feel demotivated and aloof from other team members.

Rumours can spread negative vibes within the organisation,” he avers.

HR can deal with rumours in a number of ways. “It’s not just the duty of HR, but every dedicated and devoted employee. They should first confirm the logic and factual base for any such rumour. If they can apply their con-

science and rationality, the rumour can be easily ignored. As far as HR is concerned, tactfully dealing with the rumour spreader is a critical issue. By taking the appropriate action against the culprit, organisational health can be improved,” suggests Bhamare.

Mistry believes that most of the times, rumours are born quite innocently: “In my view, 90-95 per cent of rumours are not intended to spread as false ones. If an employee is sharing some unverified information, he/she does not intend to harm anyone, but is just doing so to pass on the information to his/her colleagues and in this chain of ‘chinese whisper’, things do get misinterpreted and convoluted. The best way to prevent such things from happening is to have clear and open communication channels.” He offers more ways through which rumours can be minimised, “The communication is intended to state the complete truth. It is important for HR to be sensitive of the developments in the organisation that could possibly affect employees positively or more often than not, negatively and ensure that this is appropriately put in the right context.”

(To read the full story, log on to www.timesascent.in/jobwise)