



Lizz Insights

Words That Steal Time, Morale, Productivity, and Lives

by Lizz Chambers, CHA, CHE

Working in hotels for many years, I have heard more than my fair share of words that steal. I have most certainly been a popular target.

The way that I have survived everything, from not being 'qualified' for my position to a 'shady past' that would make a Lifetime movie pale in comparison, is that I realized early in my career that only 'small people' with limited focus will use their words to steal from others.

Yes, only small people use their words to describe the flaws of others. They will attack everything from a team member's physical attributes to their professional ability and personal lives. They seem to find joy in belittling their team members' achievements and character. The words they pass along may have little truth or be devoid of truth altogether. The only common denominator is that the words are not passed along to help but only to hurt. Such is the nature of 'gossip.'

When gossip is directed at an individual, it has the potential to ruin a reputation. Imagine how awful it must be for someone to become an object of ridicule, especially for no other reason than maybe a few small and insignificant number of people that have nothing better to do than spend not only their time but their energy gossiping, back-biting, and working at destroying one another. Instead they could spend this time standing tall as significant team members. When asked, these people will swear they are members of your team. They have forgotten that the true definition of a functional team is a group of people working together to make each other look good.

So, should you care if your staff gossips? Absolutely! Although there is no standard for measuring the effects of workplace gossip, there can be no doubt that it can destroy morale by and productivity, compromise guest service and cause resentment and pain to its targets. When associates are spending energy gossiping, then obviously, that is energy not spent on being productive. Gossip consumes an enormous amount of time that is crucial to our hotels and, as we all know, can never be regained.

Knowing the destructive results of gossip, how do we limit it? Yes, I said limit because you must understand one significant factor about the story; you will not eliminate it. It is human nature. You can only work to limit the destructive effects on your team.

To limit the destructive effects of gossip in your hotel, you must first have 'buy-in' from your entire management staff. Then together, you all can work on implementing the following techniques:



Words That Steal

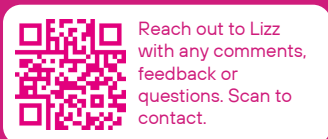
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- Review company policy for the guidelines on ethics-related matters.
- Advise each member of your staff to take personal responsibility and act ethically and with integrity to let gossip stop with them.
- Educate every team member on the fact that only small insignificant people focus on and talk about the perceived flaws of others.
- Encourage associates to see the advantages of effectively channeling all the smoke break/water cooler talk into ideas and innovations which can help drive the company toward success. The idea is to direct the talk toward accomplishing business objectives, not tearing down people.
- These people want attention. Could you not give it to them? If you and your team are busy working, you can't be available to appreciate the latest 'juicy story.'
- Better yet, respond with something positive. The fun stops when the receiver of the latest story counters with a compliment about the person who is being targeted.
- Advise your team members to keep their private life private. They should understand that if the gossiper is talking to them, the gossiper will also talk about them.
- If you notice that one person consistently passes along destructive information, take the necessary actions to eliminate the effects on the staff. Be direct. Confront the person and tell them that you or their team members do not appreciate their behavior and that it must cease immediately.
- Be sure and report out on the wonderful appointments you did schedule and the results of each.

Suppose you are interested in creating a healthy work environment. In that case, you must welcome the opportunity to use any methods which will help limit the destructive effects of those who spend their time, for which they are being paid, stealing from others. Their bad words rob your workplace of time, morale, productivity, and in the worst-case scenario, the lives of their team members.

"You can tell more about a person by what he says about others than by what others say about him."

— Anonymous



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