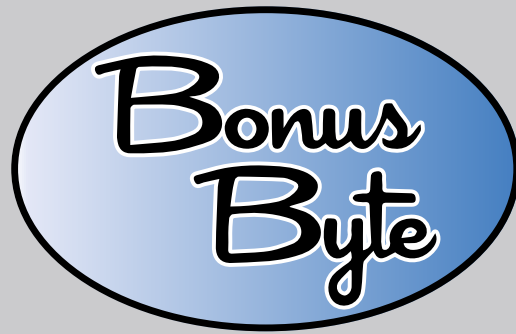


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I Heard it through the Grapevine: How to Reduce, Eliminate and Even Use Gossip in the Workplace

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE: HOW TO REDUCE, ELIMINATE AND EVEN USE GOSSIP IN THE WORKPLACE

by Kevin Eikenberry

Whitfield and Strong wrote it. Marvin Gaye sang it (and made it famous). Leaders everywhere deal with it – and worry about it all too often.

If you know the song, [I Heard It Through the Grapevine](#), hum along as we talk about how leaders can work with the grapevine and make gossip less daunting and scary.

The subtitle gives you a little context – gossip can be detrimental to morale and productivity and can lead to stress, anxiety and worry. After all, when was the last time you heard positive gossip?

If you have something that can cause all those problems, as a leader it is your responsibility to reduce or eliminate that situation – or even better, use gossip to your advantage rather than peril.

Let's get started . . .

Using it

In the military, operatives are used to gain “intel” on what the enemy is thinking, doing or planning. Clearly people on your team and in your organizations are not the enemy, but keeping your ears open and being aware of what gossip and ideas are floating around is like gaining valuable intelligence about the pulse and concerns within the organization.

Knowing that, why wouldn't you want to be tapped in?

Perhaps you believe gossip is destructive and non-productive. Even if you feel that way, there is value in knowing what is being talked about and how people feel about it. It's hard to reduce the presence of something you are unaware of, so use gossip as the first step in reducing it.

Take a clue from the song – you need to hear it through the grapevine. Only then can you trim the grapevine or even pull it out by its roots.

Reducing it

A grapevine grows quickly and spreads its newest stems to whatever it can attach itself to. That is probably why the metaphor of the grapevine has long been used to describe gossip. If as a leader you recognize the potential concerns or problems with the grapevine, you must keep your pruners at the ready – looking for ways to reduce its growth and reach.

Where the grapevine metaphor falls apart is in how it grows. A grapevine grows with ample light – the newest growth stretches toward the light. Gossip, however, grows in the darkness – with the lack of understanding and communication.

Knowing this, the best way to reduce the spread of gossip is to expose it to constantly updated information. Here are three specific ideas:

Acknowledge it. Starting a conversation with “I’ve been hearing rumblings that . . .” or otherwise “outing the gossip” (not the gossipers) is a powerful way to reduce the gossip’s spread.

Ask about it. Perhaps what you are hearing isn’t all that is being said. Once you put the messages on the table you open up the other person (or the team) to share what else you haven’t yet heard.

Address it. Talk about what you are hearing. If the gossip is incorrect, say so. If the gossip is partly correct, say so, and fill in the blanks as best you can.

Gossip can’t grow nearly as fast with communication from leadership. If you want to reduce the amount and impact of gossip, the more information you can provide, the better.

Eliminating it

Knowing the critical point hinted at in the previous section is the key to eliminating gossip and the grapevine.

Consider frequent, honest and complete communication as the shovel that will help you uproot your internal grapevine. Here, in tangible language, is what I mean:

Talk early. Many gossip grapevines grow because leaders are afraid to share information on a change or project until they have all the information. While the intention here is fine, the reality is that in the space where your communication should be, your grapevine is growing. Tell people what you know when you know it. Yes, there may be things you have to withhold for legal or other reasons, but that list is far shorter than you think. Tell people what you know when you know it, and let them know when you will be able to say more.

Talk often. Don’t make your information come in infrequent bursts. People crave information – and without it they will make it up themselves! Talk more frequently, even if you don’t feel you have very much to say.

Ask questions. The first two points say talk – but they shouldn’t be misinterpreted as one-way communication. Create early and frequent chances for conversation – spend as much time asking about and listening to concerns as you do in making your key points. Talk yes, but ask and listen too!

Be honest. If you don’t know something yet, tell them. If the decision is made, tell them. If you know when an announcement will be made, tell them. Your honesty will go far in building trust, and trust acts like a herbicide to keep new vines from starting to grow.

These ideas will work with gossip new and old, big and small.

Your efforts may not eliminate all of your gossip immediately (it is hard to kill any plant that is deeply rooted), but using these approaches vigorously, intentionally and authentically will make a difference.

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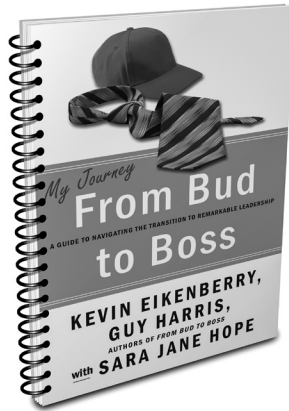
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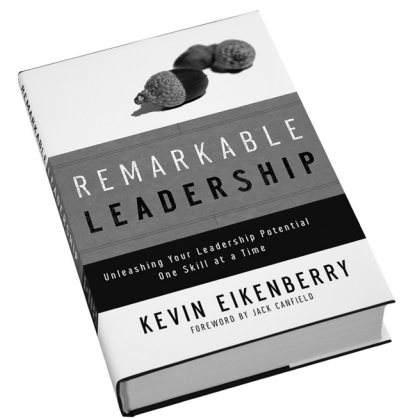


My Journey From Bud to Boss

A companion volume to the From Bud to Boss book, the Journey is a workbook designed to help you apply the knowledge gained to actual work experiences. It includes activities, questions, and exercises designed to take you beyond the concepts introduced to you during the Workshop or the book. And while this book is completely designed to be written in, all of the templates and tools are available in both PDF and Word document form so that you can use them over and over.

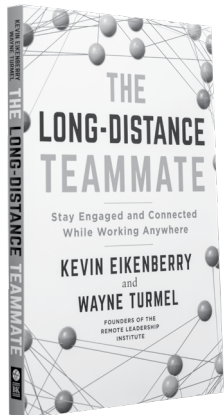
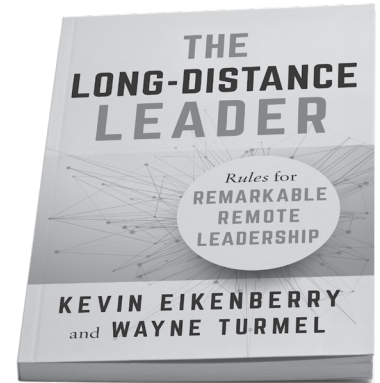
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is a practical handbook written for anyone who wants to hone the skills needed to become a remarkable leader. This book outlines a framework and a mechanism for both learning new things and applying current knowledge in a thoughtful and practical way. It explores real-world concerns such as focus, limited time, incremental improvement, and how we learn.



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is a practical, candid look at what it takes to lead people, projects and teams in today's dispersed workplace. The book showcases 19 rules for being a remarkable remote leader, and offers practical models, tools, and best practices to tackle the real-world challenges from how we work and communicate virtually.



The Long-Distance Teammate

Written by the founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, this book is the most authoritative single resource for helping remote workers get work done effectively, build relationships that are both productive and satisfying, and maintain a career trajectory when they are not in constant close contact with their leader, coworkers, or the organization in general.

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