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Judi Moreo

THE TELL-TALE TRAUMA

So you want to keep your boss informed about what's happening around the office. But you dread the stigma of being a tattletale.

JUDI MOREO suggests a few ways out.

I never know what's going on around here!" It's a statement you are hearing more and more often from an over-volatile boss.

You know the boss is frustrated by deadlines, pressures, and long hours . . . and that the office grapevine has been running rampant with gossip. But how much do you repeat to your bosses — just to keep them informed — without it appearing that you are tattling and without just adding to their frustration?

Working is a commitment to your employer and to yourself. Be a team player. Learn to get along with colleagues, working toward mutual goals. Actively support your boss's efforts. Show a genuine interest in keeping your boss up to date with what's going on.

Start with questions. "What types of things would you like me to keep you informed about? Would you like me to communicate these to you on a daily, weekly, or semi-monthly basis? Do you want the information verbally or in writing?"

Working with another person is a learning situation as well as a money-making situation. Communication is an interactive process between at least two people, whereby one of them is able to express what they mean in a clean, unambiguous way and the other person is able to understand the meaning of the message fully and properly.

When we communicate, three skills come into play:

- Visual communication skills, known as body language
- The use of your voice
- The use of words

Research is showing us that visual communication skills have the highest impact: 55% of our ability to persuade another person to our way of thinking is our ability to communicate visually; 38% is our ability to communicate our feelings and emotions by the sound of our voice, including tone, inflection, and pace; and only 7% is the choice and use of words.

Therefore, when making an attempt to communicate, we must remember that our visual image makes an even bigger impression than our words.

Use your appearance: your posture, gestures, clothing selection, hairstyle, makeup, accessories, and even the pen with which you are projecting a professional rather than a cute-young-thing image.

In business you want an image that projects conservatism, confidence, and status. Build this image daily, not just on the day you have something to report.

Make direct eye contact to reinforce your message. Looking someone in the eye when you speak shows confidence in what you are saying. It conveys a visual message of honesty and trust.

Smile only if appropriate. Women often smile in an attempt to be considered likable, even though they have bad news to report. Smiling while delivering serious information gives mixed messages.

Use simple, direct language. State the facts and don't interject your personal opinions.

Speak clearly and concisely. Don't ramble or stray from the subject at hand, as it takes the focus off the situation which you want to handle.

Take the emotion out of your voice. Emotion in the voice recreates the event for you, causing you to experience the situation again. If you are overly emotional, you may even appear as the problem.

Don't preface what you say with, "Please don't tell anyone I told you" or "Everyone would make my life difficult if they knew I was telling you this".

Instead, feed your boss the information through his or her motivational system.

Example: "I have an idea that'll turn this group into a more effective team." What boss doesn't want to hear ideas about effectiveness and team effort? This lets him or her know you are looking for ways to be supportive.

Talk in the third person. "When I was at XYZ Corporation the other day, I viewed a technique being used that might have

some impact on a similar situation we have here. May I explain it to you?"

Keep your personal opinions to yourself. Use, "There's a situation here that needs attention," instead of "I feel there is an unnecessary situation going on in this office."

Be direct. Don't hint around. "Mary and John are having a communication problem. Perhaps you would like to sit down with them to assist them in communicating better." Instead of, "I think you should keep an eye on Mary and John."

Give an understandable illustration. Your language should create an accurate picture in the boss's mind. Suggest a positive approach: "The problem with getting anyone to work overtime in this office is that all three of the secretaries are single mothers who have young children who have to be picked up at the nursery by 18:00.

"By assessing our work load on Friday for the upcoming week and advising us that we may have to put in overtime next Wednesday or Thursday, we will be better able to make arrangements for the children. One of us could pick up the other's child and the other could stay late to finish your work. Is that a workable solution for you?"

Stay in control of your image. It's the key. Never just burst into the boss's office with an emotional appeal.

Decide ahead of time exactly what you are going to say; why you felt it necessary to say it; who will benefit and who will suffer because of it; and remember, timing is of utmost importance.

Always be a part of the solution, not the problem. When you bring the boss information which will help to reduce costs, streamline operations, promote morale, or increase efficiency, your input is not only OK, it is appreciated.

You will be considered a valuable team player instead of a tattletale. You may even hear your boss telling colleagues, "I always know what's going on around here. My secretary keeps me well informed." ■

Audio Word has invited USA-based Judi Moreo to address our local secretaries in September this year. For more information phone (011) 678-5372