

Bad Mouth Disease

Recently, I had a very embarrassing and potentially “relationship-ending experience.” One of my values as I work with leaders is to help them create environments of trust by being open and honest with their teams and coworkers. Author and seminar leader Bill Thrall has given me new understanding about, “Forming high trust cultures.”

In an effort to do this with two leaders, I shared information with one about the other that I thought would help them talk honestly about an issue. In doing so, I inadvertently slipped over into the gossip arena, and betrayed confidential information. When it became clear to me what I had done, I was truly repentant and asked for forgiveness. Here is what I e-mailed.

” I want to apologize (sensing I went too far) regarding our conversation about our brother _____. In my attempt to broker healthy communication, honesty and trust between coworkers, I can sometimes share too much. I so long for people that work together in teams to have communication that is open, genuine and with all the cards on the table. There is so much wheeling and dealing, organizational politics, backstabbing, jealousy, envy, turf protecting, and competition that occurs, and it bothers me a great deal. I have both heard about and experienced far too many horror stories that would compete with Stephen King. Maybe you have as well. I so long for you and _____ to be able to be honest and have trust with each other. I am sorry. Pray that I would have wisdom to not betray confidences in any way but, at the same time, be able to facilitate “high trust cultures” that are key to so much good happening. I am coming to the conclusion that one of the key areas for a Christian leader is creating trust and being a person who can be trusted. Inappropriate “information sharing” can kill trust faster than just about anything. Possibly nothing will end a relationship faster then when one says, “I don’t feel I can trust you any more.” It’s like a knife slipped between “relational” ribs.

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In an article in “ Leadership In Action, ” (Volume 21, Number 5 November/December 2001), it says, “Research by Stanford University among executives of Fortune 500 companies found that 90% of the leaders who failed did so largely because they lacked

the interpersonal skills that are one of the key elements in emotional intelligence.” Gossip definitely flies in the face of the crucial interpersonal skill set.

Within a day or two of my embarrassing situation, I read Leviticus 19:16. For me, reading through Leviticus can sometimes be like swimming upstream in peanut butter. But in this verse, God clearly communicated a valuable truth to me. “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people.” I learned a great lesson that I am praying I won’t forget.