

# 6 Gossip Guidelines for the Professional Woman

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We know all about the Old Boys Network and how the male professional has historically established his best business connections on the golf course or in the cigar bars (and other unmentionable areas).

Fortunately for women, we've begun creating our own networking avenues by crossing gender barriers. We start our own business exchange groups and ignore the limitations of male dominated meeting locales.

Spa days and networking on the green are increasingly popular among serious professional women. It is there that we hone our natural skill-sets of communication; a.k.a. dialogue, chatting or gossip.

It is precisely because women ARE stealth-like with communication that we are effective at building relationships, both business and personal, that last and grow. In fact, Nigel Nicholson of Psychology Today magazine recognizes, "there are three very essential functions of gossip: networking, influence and social alliances."



As reputation would have it, when women bond we become sisters. Separating the two worlds of friend and associate introduces a new kind of challenge in the workplace. Where is the line drawn between friend and associate? When do we choose to stand on either side of that line and how do we keep from awkwardly straddling the two?

Following some basic guidelines to gossip will allow for maintaining strong bonds outside the workplace without sabotaging accomplishments IN the workplace.

1. Never discuss your shoe-shopping criteria or future social plans before, after or (heaven forbid) *during* a board, committee or staff meeting. To portray yourself as anything less than focused on business is a disservice to those who are. The lunchroom, parking lot or your cell phone is the more appropriate place for social conversation.
2. Never recite, even in jest, a friend's drinking adventures to your mutual work associates. We are all, without question, entitled to a personal life, as well as a private one. What happens between friends *outside* the office should stay there. Far too often, juicy stories can result in the loss of respect from fellow peers and associates for the both of you.

3. If personal knowledge leads you to question a friend's business opinion or decision, discuss it with them in private. Table the discussion if necessary, but don't challenge, embarrass or deface someone's character in front of an audience of mutual peers or associates. Even while in the office, the term "friends" indicates a certain level of respect.
4. While one of the primary functions of gossip is to exchange useful information, exercising discretion when using it is critical. Obtaining a good lead or gaining insider commentary is a benefit of communication with *friends*, but can lead to loss of trust from your *associates* when you are careless with their tips.
5. Never engage in gossip that is purely associated with malicious content and intent. To hurt someone else does not make you the better person. Ever.
6. If irreconcilable differences do occur, keep in mind that while your out-of-office friendship may be over, chances are you still need to work together to some degree. As with any office relationship, cut ties in a clean and professional manner, but bear in mind that no one needs to know what happened between you. You'll feed the flame of stereotype that women are gossips by playing "she said, she said."

The bottom line is that gossip, when used appropriately, can be an influential interpersonal communication tool. Women, with our innate skills and expanding methods of networking, can harness its power and ride it all the way to success.

After all, shouldn't we be breaking the glass ceiling *together*?



Sandy Spadaro, business owner and marketing consultant, delivers an array of workshops & seminars across the country, featuring topics of interest in business and skills growth.

Additionally, her published works in the fields of marketing, communications and image & branding development, have reached reader audiences through local and national publications. More information at [www.ssmarketingsolutions.com](http://www.ssmarketingsolutions.com).