

Understanding and Minimizing Rumors

Rumors are propositions colored by doubt or news that's improvised when none is available officially. Most rumors represent collective concerns, so they shouldn't be dismissed or allowed to blow over. That's because rumors can be quite dangerous. They can create stress, drain productivity, cause employee turnover and ruin a company's image and even reduce profits or stock value.

Types of Rumors

Bogy: A rumor that driven by fears and anxieties, such as speculation that a layoff is imminent.

Wedge-driver: A rumor that draws differences (wedges) between groups, such as an expressed belief a company only hires people from a certain ethnic group.

Pipedream: A rumor that reflect the hopes, dreams, or aspirations of people, such as conjecture that major bonuses will be handed out.

What Contributes to the Emergence of Rumors in a Group

There are four major predictors of rumors:

- 1. Anxiety:** The greater the anxiety people feel, the greater the tendency for them to produce and listen to rumors.
- 2. Ambiguity:** When people hear or read something filled with ambiguity, their attempts to make sense of what they've heard or seen often leads to rumors.
- 3. Information Importance:** The more important the information, the more likely people will both listen to, and communicate rumors.
- 4. Credibility:** If a statement comes from a trustworthy source, contains accurate points, is widely known or frequently heard, it becomes believable.

Some research suggests that synergy is necessary among the four predictors for a rumor to take flight and spread. If any one of them is not in play, the rumor will quickly dissipate if it is created at all.

Stages of a Rumor

Rumors typically go through three stages:

- 1. Generation:** The rumor is created and, typically, it is based on limited information.
- 2. Evaluation:** A potential rumor communicator will assess the validity of the information. If it's judged valid, then the spreading of the rumor continues.
- 3. Dissemination:** If the rumor passed muster at the evaluation stage, people then disseminate it.

Other Rumors Facts to Bear in Mind

- Rumors are typically disseminated very quickly through an organization
- Smaller groups will generally have more rumors, per capita, than larger groups
- Rumors often have a kernel of truth associated with them
- If the rumor is spread broadly enough, it becomes a fact in the minds of people
- Rumors are more common in close-knit, familial-type organizations
- Managers often spark rumors inadvertently, but are less likely to spread them
- Employees with fewer years of service participate most in spreading rumors
- Negative rumors are more likely to be spread by women

Coping with Rumors

Given the pervasive nature of rumors, they are difficult to eliminate. But there are proven strategies for *limiting* them.

First, you can prevent their creation by:

- Offering clear and sufficient information to reducing the uncertainty or confusion
- Reassurance when employees express anxiety about an issue or circumstance
- Attacking the source of a potential rumor to reduce the credibility of the rumor

Second, you can attempt to neutralize rumors in the works by:

- Ignoring the unimportant rumors
- Confirming the truth of rumors that are accurate, thus generating trust.
- Making comments about the rumors without repeating them, if legally advisable

[See next page for quick reference sheet on rumors]

STAGE:	Generation	Evaluation	Dissemination
Factors tied to stage:	Uncertainty/Anxiety	Credulity	Time & Repetition
<i>Guidelines for addressing stages:</i>			
<u>PREVENTION</u>			
1. Reduce generation			
-explain the unexplained	√		
-dispel anxiety	√		
-anticipate rumors	√	√	
2. Reduce credulity			
-hold a rumor workshop		√	
-establish trust		√	
3. Reduce Dissemination			
-detect early			√
<u>NEUTRALIZATION</u>			
1. Ignore impotent rumors			√
2. Confirm the rumor	√		
3. Do comment	√		
4. Refute effectively			
-based on truth		√	
-with internal consistency		√	
-with appropriate spokesperson		√	
-with understandable message		√	
-without repeating rumor			√
-using town meeting format	√	√	√