

even speaking for others, although they have no official standing, or when a single supervisor is regarded as "senior" by the work group over a number of others at the same level because of some particular trait or combination of traits. In short, interpersonal relationships and people's regard for one another describe the informal organization, at best a phantom structure that is always shifting and realigning.

People will talk. The grapevine is not required by management, and it is certainly not controlled by management. It runs merrily back and forth across departmental lines and rapidly changes its course. The grapevine is dynamic but unreliable. It carries a great deal of misinformation, but it is here to stay. Be aware of the grapevine. Tune in; listen to what it is carrying and learn from it. As a supervisor you are likely to be isolated from some of the bits and pieces the grapevine carries, or at least you will miss a few things until they have been around awhile. How much you hear is frequently dependent on how well you relate with your employees and peers.

When you are tuned in to the grapevine you are going to hear a few things that you know are simply not correct. When you hear something that is disturbing or that otherwise seems inappropriate, check it out if possible. As a supervisor you are responsible for setting the facts of the story right whenever you have the opportunity to do so, but be sure you have your story straight so you do not simply heap more speculation onto a growing rumor.

The grapevine sometimes possesses the distinct advantages of speed and depth of penetration. Some bits of news can travel through the organization at an astonishing rate and often reach people who would never think to read a bulletin board or look at an employee newsletter. The grapevine can carry the good as well as the bad, and because it will always be with you, it is to your advantage to feed it some real facts whenever possible so it will have something useful to carry.

DEALING WITH "THE UNREQUESTED INFORMATION"

Referring to the situation offered "For Consideration" at the beginning of the chapter, it is hoped that we all would consider the first option to be out of the question. You have been provided with a load of hearsay, and even without the admonition, "Please don't say I told you so," you would have no business taking any definitive action against anyone based on second-hand evidence (which is really no evidence at all). You certainly do not want to encourage one employee to continue being an informer.

Concerning the third choice, after hearing Mrs. Morris you will probably not be able to avoid being more than normally aware of Mrs. Greely's presence and behavior. So much for keeping an eye on Mrs. Greely; you will be fairly sensitive to everything she does for some time to come. If you thank Mrs. Morris at all you should stress the "concern for the department." However, asking her to - "say nothing to anyone else" is risky in that doing so might seem to be drawing the two of you into a conspiratorial relationship.

The best option is the middle one, but it does not go far enough. You need to question her concerning what she has been telling you. If you have heard general condemnations, you should ask for specifics; for example, exactly who did

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precisely what and when, and how it could be proven. You need to tell her that without provable specifics you can take no action on anything she perceives as a problem.

Also, in a situation such as this you need always to watch out for factionalism—division in the ranks of your employees. Perhaps Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Greeley are at the centers of opposing factions—not a far-fetched notion—and either faction would probably like to have you perceive that one as the “good” one.

You will need to keep your eyes open concerning your entire department, and step up your meetings with individual employees and small groups as possible. Undoubtedly something is going on, but based on Mrs. Morris’s information you have no idea what it is. Unfortunately, all Mrs. Morris really did by coming to you was to provide you the basis for some substantial worry.

WHICH WAY DO YOU FACE?

Your employees are likely to infer a great deal about your overall attitude as a supervisor according to how effectively you communicate. It is also likely that many such inferences will be influenced by your visibility and availability; that is, how much your employees see of you in and around the department and how readily they can get a few minutes of your time when they need it.

In our organizations there are many pressures that cause us to “face upward” and in general be most visible and available to our superiors and other members of higher management. After all, it is notice from above that leads to pay increases, promotions, and other rewards. There are some traps in this reasoning, however. Not all higher managers are necessarily impressed by your ready availability to them. In fact, some of the more effective top managers, if they see what they believe is too much of you, will begin to wonder who is running your department while you are busy looking upward.

Supervisors must be conscious of the necessity to develop and cultivate all communicating relationships in the organization, but the most important communicating relationships will remain those that you establish with your employees. Regardless of the number and capability of the managers in any health-care institution, it remains largely the nonmanagerial employees who do the hands-on work of delivering patient care. You are there to ensure that the portion of patient care for which you are responsible is accomplished in the best interest of the patients. Your primary attentions belong to the people who do the work. In the last analysis, it remains your employees who, through their job performance, can determine whether you succeed or fail as a manager.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it generally more difficult for information to flow upward than downward in the work organization?
2. Why is effective communication with your fellow supervisors usually more difficult to achieve than with your employees?

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