

Mission Ready

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Rumor in the Workplace

With the recent massive layoffs at so many high tech companies—companies that have been thought of, over the years, as stable and flourishing—an uneasy feeling has spread throughout the workforces of other organizations, perhaps even yours.

Unwarranted rumor can be a real killer in terms of productivity and morale; anxiety among the rank and file can take the wind out of the sails of the grandest corporations. Dealing with rumor in the workplace is a leadership issue of the highest priority. And that's why it is so sad to see so many examples of upper management remaining silent, as whispering campaigns spread throughout their organizations like a cancer. Perhaps senior management feels that it is beneath their dignity to comment upon company gossip, and that its comments would only lend credence to the rumors. But silence from above is not the answer, it only confirms the suspicions of the rank and file, who can only come to the conclusion, "It must be true, management is not denying it."

The best way to stop rumor is to prevent anxiety from taking hold in the first place—and that can only be ac-

complished by a manager who has never lied to his or her people. Managers who build a reputation of credibility—and who share with their employees both the good news and, perhaps even more importantly, the bad news—are an organization's best bet against the loss of productivity and valued personnel due to unfounded rumors of impending layoffs, lost contracts, reduced value of company stock, etc., etc., etc.

We have to ask ourselves: am I that kind of manager. Am I open and frank with my subordinates? Do I share with them news of company triumphs, as well as the bad news of lost market share? Does the rank and file view me as part of an exclusive managerial club, immune from personnel cuts, or do they see me as their leader, whose career is linked to their productivity and general well-being? When our employees always trust us to give them the straight truth, the destructive whispering campaigns will cease; and their fellow workers will look upon those who persist in spreading rumors as "out of the loop."