

LIVING WITH THE GRAPEVINE

Fortune magazine estimates that U.S. industry is confronted by a minimum of 33 million fresh rumors every working day. If valid, that startling statistic emphasizes a major problem facing everyone who manages people.

Rumors come in all shapes and sizes, from the big ones which created a climate of fear around Three Mile Island and DC-10s to the little ones which are passed along the grapevine in every office or factory. Once started, they are almost impossible to stamp out, even in a small organization.

Experts say that rumors depend on the importance of the subject matter multiplied by the ambiguity of the existing facts. They flourish because of uncertainty, social strain or plain boredom, and internal rumors can be as damaging as external ones.

When you are faced with a rumor in your organization, you have three choices. You can tackle it head-on; you can outflank it by introducing new facts or findings that make it irrelevant and ridiculous, or you can postpone comment indefinitely. Repressive measures are not really an alternative because when normal sources of information are shut off, the grapevine flourishes.

Of course, it is possible to turn the grapevine to your advantage. Once you know how the rumors are spread, you can pass along accurate information and obtain feedback from your employees.

In some organizations, it is actually a morale builder both as a form of entertainment and as an underground communications network that creates a "we're all in this together" feeling.

Reprint FORE FRONT

**We're seen in all the
right places.**



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