

# HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

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In the history of the world, there has been more information shared by word of mouth than any other method. There has also been a good deal of misinformation shared the same way. Go back about 30 years or so to the era of Andy Griffith and Aunt Bea - an era of sewing bees and barbershop gossip. The town of Mayberry was an open book for anyone who as much as walked down the street. Everyone knew all the business of everyone else. Whether it be the brand of hair creme Goober used to slick his hair, or Floyd's personal financial picture, all information was common knowledge. So it was in small town America. So, too can it be in a small circle of professionals.

When we were kids, there was a game that we played called telephone. The rules were simple. A child at one end of the line would whisper a short statement to the next person in line. That person would in turn whisper the same message to the next person and soon, at the end of the line, the last person would announce out loud what the message he or she heard. For example, Tommy begins the game, "The big red fox is dumb to go into Uncle Bob's cornfield." This typically childish statement slowly makes its way down the line, whispered with a giggle and a gasp, finally making its way to a proud Billy who excitedly renders the words he's just heard. "The red fox took a big dump in Uncle Bob's cornflakes!" he exclaims.

It's easy to see in this small example that stories get turned around and meanings get changed as information goes through the grapevine. In the past six months I have heard at least three

tid-bits of "news" that turned out to be categorically false. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing where the news started, or where it got turned around. There are probably many examples of information that you heard through the grapevine that turned out to be less than factual and true. Most of the time this mis-information is harmless; however, there are

a few cases where a person's or organization's reputation is at stake. These are the cases where, as professionals, we must be careful to screen what we hear and not to repeat untruths.

**I must admit that I like to be on top of the news.** I read the daily paper, watch the national and local television news, listen to radio news, (KQ92 is preferable, I'm not old enough to enjoy 'CCO yet) and yes, wait with ears perked for grapevine rumblings about happenings in our industry. The grapevine is the place where you typically hear who got the job, what courses lost some turf, where the new course is being built and which suppliers are changing corporate philosophies. In other words the grapevine is the conduit for news - and gossip - therein lies the challenge for news hungry Superintendents...separate fact from rumor, news from gossip and never repeat things you don't know for sure.

In an effort to reduce the amount of misinformation that goes around the industry, I invite you to join me in following a few guidelines with regard to grapevine news:

1) **Never pass information about a person that could be considered detrimental** or slanderous to him or her or their career. For example, if you hear Jim-Bob has been drinking like a sailor on shore leave lately, and his job is in jeopardy, don't repeat it. What if it isn't true? Even asking a leading question like "Have you heard anything about Jim-Bob being a slobbering lush?" is enough to give him the reputation even if he has been sober for months. Rumors that are untrue travel just as fast as those that are true.

2) **If you hear something that is unbelievable, it probably is.** In other words, check out rumors that common sense tells you are false. In these cases, either forget you ever heard it, or go to the source and ask him or her. A case in point was the "Jacobsen bought Ransomes" rumor. Although true to a degree, it was a case where the facts should be heard from authorities before repeating them with their permission.

3) **Forget some information as soon as you hear it.** Sometimes what people hear is more than what they wanted to know. It's like hearing your parents talk about sexual fantasies: You just wish the conversation would have never started.

4) **Always be suspicious of the statement: "This is just a rumor, but..."** If that's all the substantiation that a news source has, then it's best to tune out. Similarly, it's just as bad to inform someone else of information that needs such a disclaimer. If it's just a rumor, then bury it.

5) **Remember that if you're talking about someone else, then there is probably someone talking about you.** If you spread negative information about someone else, those negative vibes will return to you.

Having an ear to the ground and a sense of what is going on around us is good business sense. After all, it is said that knowledge is power. But, at the risk of endangering careers and reputation let's all think twice before we attempt to share information that may be of suspicious origins or negative in nature. We know that the grapevine will continue to be a source of information, but hopefully one that is truthful and kind.

*(Editor's Note: This article was re-printed from the May 1998 issue of Hole Notes.)*

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