

Make It Work Q & A

Stop responding to self-absorbed e-mails

Coach Vera Held's verdict on difficult situations at work.

Vera N. Held, Special to QMI Agency



Q: My colleague "Sylvia" regularly e-mails me on everything she's up to at work. She never even bothers to ask how I'm doing. How can I avoid listening to all her stuff?

A: Sounds like Sylvia is self-absorbed and in love with the sound of her own voice. Some people feel if they record their activities and forward them to others by e-mail, that it's a legitimate form of sharing. But it's not. True sharing is reciprocal and is based on the premise that both sides care, and are interested in each other's welfare and in the exchange of information. The fact that Sylvia expects you to care about her work but shows no interest in yours, speaks volumes. Set a firm boundary and stick to it. Only acknowledge and respond to projects that you are both involved in.

Sylvia is an energy vampire in the making and needs to be reigned in fast.

Q: One of our team members admitted to an error yet he still got a tongue-lashing from our manager "Evan" in front of everyone. He's a good guy and a smart one who made the error due to our insane deadlines. He quit the following week.

A: Getting and giving feedback needs to always happen behind close doors. Anything other is unprofessional. Sounds like Evan, too, was stressed out and had a knee-jerk reaction to a situation where a critical deadline was involved. It also sounds like Evan was unable for whatever reason(s) to apologize for his inappropriate public display. As for your teammate who took the lashing and quickly quit, he may indeed have felt he had no other choice. Evan publically humiliated him and it would be hard for him to respect Evan and continue to work in his team without a sincere apology. I hope your teammate lands in a healthy workplace where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities.

Q: My boss and the co-worker I recommended for the job are both gossipmongers. I've told my co-worker to stop. I don't want her behaviour to reflect badly on me. Last time she was gossiping, I became really irritated and said, "I need to get back to work."

A: I'd like to suggest another approach. Take your colleague off-site for a coffee and explain to her how being a gossip does not serve her. Explain to her that she will hurt herself and hurt you at the same time. Show your soft side. This approach strikes a human cord and is far more relatable than telling her you need to get back to work. That statement also implies judgment and that she, too, should be working in lieu of gossiping. The old saying "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" applies.

Vera Held (www.veraheld.com) is a coach, facilitator, speaker, writer, PR consultant and the author of business best-seller *How Not to Take it Personally*. Send your tough workplace questions to vera@veraheld.com.