



Beat the Backstabber

by Grace L. Judson

The other day, I had lunch with a friend (I'll call her Sue) who's been struggling with a backstabber in her office. (I'll call him George.)

George has been shooting down Sue's ideas to her face, in meetings, and behind her back. He's started parallel projects, despite the duplicate effort. And he gossips about Sue with others in the company.

Fortunately for Sue, her work is excellent. She's won organizational awards, her peers like and respect her, and her boss is happy with her work. So Sue's job isn't in immediate danger from George's backstabbing efforts — but her peace of mind and job satisfaction are. In fact, she's thinking about leaving, though she enjoys and appreciates everything else about her work.

There are many things that could be said about why organizations tolerate behavior like George's. But that's not much help to Sue. Sue knows she's giving George the power to make her miserable — all she has to do is listen to his voice in a meeting, whether he's talking to (or about) her or not, and her stomach clenches. She recognizes that although her intellectual understanding of the situation is a step in the right direction, it's not helping her let go of her emotional reaction.

And the fact is that Sue's reactions to George's behavior *will* ultimately threaten her job security, despite the quality of her work.

Even if her manager and peers don't know what's up between her and George, it's unfortunately human nature to believe gossip. Ultimately, George's snips and snipes, combined with Sue's uneasy reactions, will take root, and people will start to wonder. After all, "there's no smoke without a fire."

And Sue's manager will eventually question why Sue hasn't done anything about the situation, why she's continuing to allow it to get to her.

There's no miracle cure for backstabbers, especially if your boss, the backstabber's boss, and the organization as a whole are unwilling to face the issue. However, if — like Sue — there are other reasons why you like your job and want to stay put, here are three things you can do.

Update Your Resume

Yes, I know I just said that these are things you can do if you want to *keep* your job! Nonetheless, this is the first thing that anyone coping with a backstabber should do. Here's why.

First, you'll be prepared if you reach a point where you can't take it any more — or if the worst happens, and the backstabber spreads so much ill will that you end up fired or laid off.

More importantly, though, writing your resume is one of the best ways to prove to yourself that you're *good* at what you do. Describing your accomplishments, listing your promotions, enumerating your awards — there's nothing more powerful to help you really internalize how much excellent work you've accomplished.

Stepping into that power, remembering it when things get difficult — whether with your version of George or anything else that arises during the day — can transform how you present yourself.

So update your resume, and read it over on a regular basis. And keep it updated!

Let Go of the Attachment

When people see you getting visibly upset at the backstabber's antics, it's inevitable that they'll start wondering. First, they'll wonder why you don't do something. Then they'll figure that you're not doing anything because the backstabber's *right* in what he or she is saying. It's that "no smoke without a fire" thing.

Is that fair? No — but who said life, especially corporate life, was fair?

You may think you're hiding your reactions, but you're not. If you don't believe me, ask a trusted co-worker who's seen you in encounters with the backstabber. Your body language, word choices, and tone of voice will give you away no matter how good you are at covering up.

Let go of your attachment. Stop believing that the backstabber "shouldn't" be saying these things. He or she *is* saying them — why waste your time and energy arguing with reality? When you stop arguing with reality, you can also stop taking it personally. You can notice that it's just something that's happening.

When you smile with real amusement at the backstabber's antics, everyone is impressed. And they'll stop doubting you. After all, if you're not getting upset, there must be nothing to be upset about.

Take Action

Your mother's advice to "just ignore the bully, and he'll stop bothering you" didn't work back when you were a kid, and it doesn't work now.

From your new place of confidence and no attachment, you'll find it easier to take a stand. This isn't about being angry or confrontational. Instead, as one of my clients recently discovered, it's about being unemotional and forthright.

Stick to the facts: "That's not on the agenda for today's meeting, and these aren't the people who need to be involved."

Make clear, unambiguous requests: "If you have a question about project status, please come to me instead of talking to my team."

And stay alert. Your body and your emotions will clue you in quickly when you're about to fall back into reaction and attachment. Don't beat yourself up about it. These are skills many people never learn — and they take some time and courage to master. Just notice it, and if you can, walk away and take a break.

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884 - 1962, U.S. First Lady 1933 - 1945, American political leader and suffragist.

If you liked this article, you can [sign up](#) to receive Grace's regular newsletter!

About the Author: *Grace Judson is an executive coach and business consultant with more than two decades of experience in strategic planning, coaching, business planning, and tactical execution. She specializes in corporate politics and culture issues, and is especially interested in gender politics and the*

issues of women and gender role expectations in the workplace. For more information, go to:
www.svahaconcepts.com.

Article Date: January 22, 2008