

Confronting the 'TMI' employee

Q: “Whenever one of my employees, ‘Gina,’ has personal problems, she describes them to everyone in excruciating detail. Then she calls her friends on the phone to talk about them some more. Gina does a good job, but these conversations take up a lot of time.

“Recently, a friend of Gina’s passed away very suddenly. I am certainly sympathetic about this tragedy, but she continues to relive the event with her co-workers over and over again. Most of them are understanding, but they still have work to do. How can I put a stop to this without seeming hard-hearted?” *Caring & Concerned*

A: To avoid appearing insensitive, view this as a two-part intervention. First, to resolve the immediate issue, gently encourage Gina to curb her repetitive recounting of the friend’s untimely demise.

For example: “Gina, I was terribly sorry to hear about your friend’s death, and I know how sad you must feel. It can be quite difficult to get such a tragic event out of your mind. However, I need to ask you to spend less time talking about this with your co-workers. Although they are very sympathetic, they do need to focus on their work.”

If Gina continues to obsessively ruminate about the problems in her life, you will need to discuss the issue in more general terms. Explain that she must reduce the amount of time spent on personal conversations and that you will be following up with her to track her progress.

Also, since people seldom keep talking unless others keep listening, you may want to communicate some general office standards to everyone. When any discussion becomes too lengthy, co-workers should feel free to excuse themselves by saying “I’d love to keep chatting, but unfortunately I have to get back to work.”

Do you spend too much time talking about personal topics? Here's one way to find out: [Are You Guilty of TMI at Work?](#)