

How to handle overly chatty co-workers

Occasional chitchat is a good way to improve interpersonal relationships, but when it's overdone, it can be an annoying barrier to finishing the job, as two readers pointed out recently on the [Admin Pro Forum](#):

"My desk is in a high-traffic area, and a few employees talk to me as they walk by. Some rattle on and on about relationship issues and interoffice gossip." — Rachel, administrative support

"Two of my co-workers frequently have personal conversations about five feet away from my desk area. The sound is very annoying and distracting to me." — Pat, accounts receivable

We spoke to a couple of experts to find out how best to resolve this problem.

Sometimes a conversation isn't unwanted; it's just badly timed. When that's the case, consider asking for a rain check on the conversation, says Tara Goodfellow, at Athena Educational Consultants, Inc. "State that you'd love to catch up with her, but have a great deal of work to tackle. Offering other options sends the message that you do care, but there is a more appropriate time and place for personal conversation."

If you're being bombarded with gossip about your co-workers or your company, Leigh Steere, co-founder of Managing People Better suggests saying something like: "I hear that you are frustrated with our department's policies. But venting to me and your other co-workers about the situation pulls down morale. Also, we're here to do a job, and none of us can be very effective if we spend too much time at the water cooler. It's time to go to your manager or HR with these concerns."

Not saying anything about what's bothering you teaches your co-worker that disrupting your workday is OK. Next time it happens, speak up.