

Office feuds: Sink your career in seconds

Q: “I feel that I have been betrayed by one of my peers. ‘Chuck’ and I are both senior vice-presidents, reporting to the president of our company. In a recent executive team meeting, Chuck stated that an employee in my department has been intercepting and reading the president’s email for several months.

“Chuck has apparently known this for some time, but instead of telling me privately, he chose to throw me under the bus by revealing it in front of our boss. He called me naïve for not knowing about it. After this humiliating betrayal, I’m not sure how to act around Chuck. Should I just speak to him when we have to work together and ignore him the rest of the time?” *Infuriated*

A: This little soap opera raises so many interesting questions. Why is your fury directed at Chuck instead of the snooping employee? How did Chuck obtain his incriminating information? And isn't the president angry that Chuck took so long to expose this outrageous misconduct?

Despite my curiosity, I will try to focus on the question you actually asked. You say that Chuck mentioned this transgression in a meeting, then expressed surprise at your lack of awareness. This is not necessarily devious behavior, so prior experience must be causing you to question his intentions.

If Chuck does wish to embarrass you, reacting like a pouting adolescent will only make the situation worse. By not speaking to him, you will escalate this incident into an ongoing feud, making others uncomfortable and making yourself look silly. A better approach would be to present your concerns in a mature, businesslike manner.

For example: “Chuck, I was stunned when you mentioned Ed’s email snooping in our staff meeting. If you had come to me when you first learned of it, I could have taken immediate action. In the future, please tell me right away if you hear about inappropriate activities in my department, and I promise to do the same for you.”

After that, drop the subject, but keep a close eye on Chuck. His future conduct should reveal whether he is a true adversary or simply a thoughtless person.

I do hope you realize, however, that the real betrayer is the employee who infiltrated the president’s email account. I assume this person has now been fired. If not, then that’s the most baffling question of all.

Unfortunately, some people at work do like to play political games. Here's one variety: [Political Games, Part 1: Power Games](#)