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# THE NEW PARTY RULES

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- THROW A SECRET SUPPER NOT POTLUCK
- + IT'S COOL TO BE HOME ALONE

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# OFFICE CHAT - or too much info?

When chatting with colleagues turns to our lives outside work, are we just sharing anecdotes – or creating gossip fodder? **ASHLEY CHIA** susses out when you're crossing the TMI line.

**W**hen you're with the same people throughout an eight-hour workday, five days a week, it's nearly impossible to keep your private life totally private. But just how much of it should you share with colleagues that won't make you the butt of jokes? We get the opinions of experts – and co-workers – on seven likely scenarios.

## YOU'RE REELING FROM A HANGOVER

### EXPERT'S TAKE

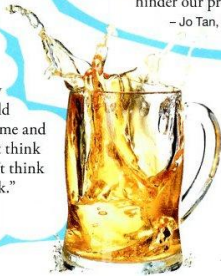
Binge drinking the night before may not have caused you to call in sick the next day but it's best to keep mum about it. "Rule of thumb: Don't drink beyond your capacity during the work week because a hangover is known to affect work performance," advises Sabreana Andriesz, executive coach and founder of personal and business coaching and counselling consultancy The Conscious Choice.

"I would discourage you from sharing such information with your colleagues. If you are really not up to working, call in sick," Sabreana adds. Tracy Lim-Chong, director of career and life management company Passionswork, agrees. "You should always maintain a professional image of yourself," she says.

### INSIDER'S TAKE

"My colleague would talk about how silly she is when she's drunk. She would tell me how she didn't remember getting home and we would always have a good laugh. I don't think there's anything wrong with that and I don't think ill of her. We all have a life outside work."

— Lynn\*, 29, account executive



## YOU'RE UNHAPPY ABOUT YOUR JOB/BOSS/CO-WORKER

### EXPERT'S TAKE

Unfortunately, this is common but complaining about your unhappiness at work is possibly the worst thing you could do. "[It] neither improves the situation nor makes you feel any better

about it," says Hega. "What's worse, many co-workers could use such information to stab you in the back, which can cost you your job and good relationships."

If you're facing a problem with your boss or a colleague, address it as soon as possible. "Find a way to resolve it with the person directly or discuss it with a trusted person who would be able to guide and offer a confidential, objective and neutral viewpoint," suggests Sabreana.

### INSIDER'S TAKE

"I had a colleague who constantly bitched about our boss and expected us to agree with her. I eventually got tired of the bitching but I didn't know how to tell her to stop. When she left the company, not many bothered to say goodbye. We were all tired of her playing the victim." — Kate\*, 27, communications executive

"My colleague grumbles about work and the boss, which I think is inappropriate. This is his first job. He should treat everything as a learning experience." — Shirley\*, 25, public relations executive

## YOUR LIFE OUTSIDE WORK

### EXPERT'S TAKE

Sharing information about your life outside work will help strengthen bonds between you and your colleagues and show you have a good work-life balance. But ration out your personal revelations. Says Hega Schultz, CEO of HS Coaching & Consulting: "By all means let them know you went to a restaurant or watched a movie. But leave out everything that could impact your image in a negative way."

### INSIDER'S TAKE

"When my colleagues ask what I did over the weekend, I give standard answers and tell them that I watched a movie or stayed home even if I didn't. I draw a clear line between my work and personal life. I feel getting personal with my colleagues may hinder our professional relationship."

— Jo Tan, 24, leasing executive

## COLLEAGUE OR FRIEND?

We all have a person at work we click well and share a close bond with, says Hega. "You've probably known that person for a while and have established a feeling of trust. There is nothing wrong with inviting her to join your clique of personal friends."

Debbie Yam, 25, a designer, says: "Why not? But only if that colleague is cool and can keep mum about my friends and private life in the office."

While there are no hard and fast rules for this scenario, Tracy cautions: "If you value and prefer your privacy, keep colleagues and personal friends apart."

## LOVE MEN SEX

## YOU'RE IN DEBT

### EXPERT'S TAKE

If you don't want people talking behind your back, then keep this secret. "Being in debt is something you should keep quiet as it can affect your image negatively," says Hega. "If you are unable to manage your finances, people may think there are other things you can't handle as well. Only share this kind of information with very close friends or professionals who can help you to address and solve the problem."



### INSIDER'S TAKE

"I'm not in debt but I wouldn't reveal it if I was, as it might reflect poorly on my character, like lacking self-control." — Jessica\*, 24, content producer

## YOU'VE BROKEN UP WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND

### EXPERT'S TAKE

It's okay to let your colleagues know, but stay away from dwelling on your feelings, Hega advises. "Talking too much about them will give the impression that you can't cope with the situation and that your performance will be affected by it."



### INSIDER'S TAKE

"My colleague has shared her feelings and stories about her relationships and she's felt better. I'm okay with that. She probably wants to share her thoughts with someone outside her circle of friends." — JJ\*, 30, account executive

## YOU HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS

### EXPERT'S TAKE

It's not advisable to discuss your health problems at work. By not telling, you would avoid being the target of malicious gossip. "If you need time off because of severe depression, for example, you should let your boss know. But there is no need to give specific details to your colleagues," says Hega.

### INSIDER'S TAKE

"I'd certainly feel uncomfortable if a colleague confided in me about her depression or a mental illness but only because I wouldn't know how to deal with the situation." — Jacquelin Pan, 26, jewellery designer

## FAMILY TROUBLES

### EXPERT'S TAKE

Such problems — usually ill parents or a wayward sibling — hinder your work performance. "Discussing these problems with your colleagues may lead them to wonder if you're distracted from doing your job," says Tracy. "It may also reveal your weaknesses and difficulties in managing certain areas in your life. You don't want to do this, especially if you're in a position of authority."

### INSIDER'S TAKE

"I confided in a colleague about my family problems once. She listened patiently and I could feel her concern was genuine. It was a relief for me. I guess it depends on whether you trust the people around you or not. I've left the company for almost a year and we're still good friends." — Charlene\*, 34, sales manager

## NEVER, EVER TOUCH THESE TOPICS AT WORK

**Religion and politics**  
Such views are personal and sensitive. "You should never try to force your ideas onto others," says Tracy. "As for religion, do not attempt to convert your colleagues. If you want to share your faith, do so after office hours."

### Your sex life

Sharing sexually intimate details is inappropriate, says Sabreana. It's not a topic that belongs in a professional context.

### Addictions of any kind (gambling, alcoholism, etc)

It is too personal and will only lead to rumours behind your back, says Hega.

### Career goals

Do not share your hopes of moving to another organisation, says Tracy. Also, never reveal any information that will make your colleagues or boss question your loyalty to the company or commitment to your job.

\* Not their real names