

Not Too Honest: Leave your most personal issues at home

Written by Julie Desmond
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Workplace conversations can get even the best employees into trouble. Working with the same people day after day, week after week, the comfort level goes up and good judgment goes away. Employees who tell too much can find themselves at odds with co-workers, managers and sometimes with HR. The best way to get ahead at work is to stay upbeat, professional and successful.

Tell the truth. Most jobs require multiple interviews. If you get too creative about your past, it will be difficult to keep your own stories straight. Interviewers take notes. Storytellers usually don't. The people you interview with are the people you will work with and they will remember what you said. Just be honest.

But not too honest. If you hated your boss and your co-workers were inept, you can state simply, It wasn't a positive environment. Or, we didn't always see eye to eye. Wild horses and curious co-workers can drag the whole truth from you, especially during a happy hour, but your job is to stay optimistic and friendly; you never know who knows whom, and bad mouthing a bad manager looks bad no matter how bad the situation was.

Get personal. Your experiences are unique and valuable. Choose to share the positives: I bought a car, my sister won the lottery, my team won the Super Bowl, my customer doubled his order.

But not too personal. You leave early once a week for marriage counseling; you went through treatment; you took time off three jobs ago to recover from a nasty divorce... As your friend, I care deeply. As a manager or colleague, the last thing I need is baggage, even if the baggage was left behind long ago. People today offer way too much information. At work, none of your career choices have anything to do with your personal life. Unless you're asked. Repeatedly. And even then, keep it brief and, as fast as you can, get back to talking about something positive.

At work, people count on you – and pay you - to do the job you were hired to do. Be an expert in your role, stay enthusiastic and keep your conversations light. You are uniquely qualified to be the best at your job. Be that. And leave your criticisms, prejudices, baggage and bad attitude at home.

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