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Profanity at work is usually inappropriate

Question: I work with a number of people who use profane language quite often. I hate to be a prude but how can I get them to stop?

Answer: You are not a prude, you are a professional. Profanity at work is considered unprofessional and inappropriate. Are many of us guilty of it? Yes.

Some studies indicate that profanity at work can actually be a "relief mechanism." A survey by WorldWIT, an online network for professional women, found that 80 percent of its members believe profanity at work is on the rise, especially in stressful situations. And let's be honest, these are stressful times we're living in.

However, what is cathartic for one employee can be offensive to another.

My suggestion to you would be to try your best to ignore it, handle all situations as professionally as possible and lead by example. Also, consider the situation. Is it between people who know one another well and have a personal as well as professional relationship? That type of banter can be seen as normal.

But if it's happening in inappropriate situations, in meetings or in groups of people who are unfamiliar with one another, then it's not appropriate. If it is an uncomfortable and unprofessional situation, there are two recommended options. One would be to let the offenders know that their language makes you uncomfortable and inform them how using profanity makes them less credible at their job. Or, you could also make a face or ask the rhetorical question, "Is that language really necessary?" Most people will get the point.

Keep in mind the manner in which the words were used. Is the language directed to somebody in particular? "Jim Jones is such an @##%&*\$ is completely different than someone venting." If someone is letting off steam, I think it is best to let them rant and rave. This is when using profanity at work is a "relief mechanism."

The second option would be to take your concern/complaint to Human Resources or your supervisor. Depending on how vulgar the language is, profanity at work can actually be sexual harassment. If you believe that is the case, I would definitely take your complaint to HR.

How we conduct ourselves at work and the way we choose to communicate with our colleagues is a great reflection on our character.

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