

HOW TO DEAL WITH A NIGHTMARE CO-WORKER

THE TALKER

The Talker just won't shut up.



Look busy.

Free time means chat time to the Talker. Leave paper-work handy on your desk, and spreadsheets or other documents open on your computer at all times. When the Talker approaches, stare at the task intently and pretend not to notice his arrival.



Evade and deflect.

Say, "I'd love to hear more, but I've got to finish this by [fifteen minutes from now]." Or, rise from your desk and say, "Oh my gosh, I've got to go to that meeting." As you walk away, suggest that another co-worker has expressed interest in whatever is on the Talker's mind and aim him in that direction.



"Yes" the conversation to death.

Talkers are often of the life-is-a-struggle type, for whom everything is a hardship, and they must convince you of this. As the Talker's tale unfolds, keep agreeing with the Talker, but be sure you do not ask a question or volunteer information. After five flat

agreements ("Yes . . . yes, I see.") the Talker should count this as adequate confirmation and wander off.



Avoid showing emotion.

Do not be cheerful around the Talker, as this may make her dejected and even more talkative. Do not be sad around the Talker, since this may encourage him to top your tale of woe with his own.

THE KISS-UP

The Kiss-Up craves approval mostly from the boss, but will also seek approval from you.



Congratulate her on her dedication and achievements, no matter how dubious:

"You've sure got a way with a spreadsheet," "It's not everyone who'd work five straight weekends," or "You make the *best* coffee."



Get her to do some of your own work as well.

Suggest that this is a good way to further bring her talents to the boss's attention.



Avoid her during restructuring.

During times of management turmoil or when the chain of command is uncertain, the Kiss-Up may become disoriented or hostile. Give her a wide berth.

THE TMI (TOO MUCH INFORMATION)

TMIs have no boundaries and no shame. Every unsettling piece of personal information is worth sharing with you.



Avoid TMIs on Mondays.

The weekend will provide him with an abundance of ammunition for inappropriate personal tales. By Tuesday or Wednesday, he may have expended the most harrowing of these stories on fellow workers.



Do not get on an elevator with a TMI.

If you see a TMI waiting for an elevator, take the stairs. If you are already inside the elevator, feign some activity—a forgotten wallet, pocketbook, or keys—that will provide an excuse for your quickly exiting to retrieve the item.



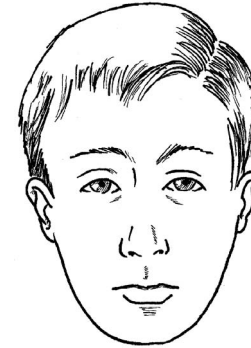
Maintain a buffer of at least two co-workers between the TMI and yourself at any company party or off-site function.

If the first co-worker bolts, you will still have time for evasive maneuvers as the TMI engages the second.

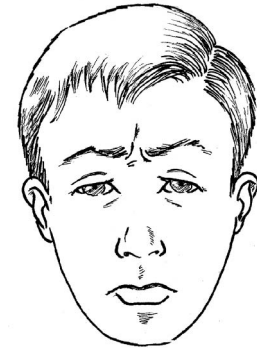


Say, “Thanks for sharing.”

Upon the completion of a long and sordid tale—his tapeworm, his night on the town, or his dream about the boss—say “Thanks for sharing.” Without further comment or response from you, the TMI will move on to seek a more appreciative audience.



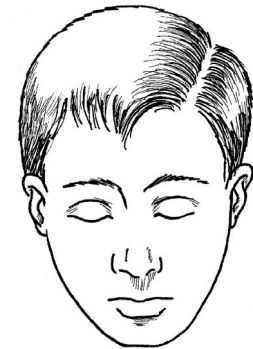
neutral



concern



interest



asleep

Practice these useful expressions to mask your true feelings.

THE GOSSIP

While sharing many of the characteristics of the TMI, the Gossip specializes in spreading too much information about other people.



Beware the signs.

A sure sign of a hopeless (but amateur) gossip is someone who proceeds a statement with, “I shouldn’t be telling you this but . . .” or, “I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone but . . .” Apply the techniques for avoiding a TMI, above, to save yourself from a gossip who wants to tell you everything.



Bait and switch.

Offer outrageous stories about yourself in order to stun and distract him from prying into your true private life. With a serious expression, tell the Gossip that you were locked in the monkey cage at the zoo all weekend and had the time of your life; or that you accidentally sent a very revealing personal photo via e-mail to all the executives in the company. The juicier the story, the better. When he asks, “Is that true?” say, “I’m sorry, I can’t talk about it anymore.”

