

ARTICLE · CULTURA & SAÚDE

If the Gossip Used Sieves...

A parable on rumors: the test of truth, kindness, and necessity

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ABSTRACT

This is a small, widely circulated parable about the habit of gossip. Olavo, newly transferred to a project, tries to please his new boss by passing along a rumor about a colleague. The boss, Juliano, interrupts him and proposes putting the story through three sieves: the sieve of Truth (whether the fact is verifiably true), the sieve of Kindness (whether he would want the same said about himself), and the sieve of Necessity (whether it is really necessary to tell it). Realizing that the story passes none of them, Olavo acknowledges that nothing is left to be said. The narrative closes with an exhortation to use these sieves before spreading rumors and with the maxim that intelligent people talk about ideas, ordinary people about things, and mediocre people about people.

KEYWORDS: *gossip; rumor; three sieves; ethics; folk wisdom; coexistence*

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Olavo was transferred to a new project. On the very first day, to get on the good side of his new boss, he came out with this:

- Boss, you can't imagine what they told me about Silva. They said he...

He barely finishes the sentence when Juliano, the boss, cuts in:

- Hold on a moment, Olavo. Has what you're about to tell me already passed through the sieve of the three sieves?

- Sieves? What sieves, boss?

- The first, Olavo, is the sieve of Truth. Are you sure this fact is absolutely true?

- No... no, I'm not. How could I know? It's just what they told me... But I think that...

And, once again, Olavo is interrupted by the boss.

- Then your story has already failed the first sieve. Let's go to the second sieve, which is the sieve of Kindness:

what you're about to tell me, would you like others to say the same about you?

- Of course not! God forbid, boss! - says Olavo, alarmed.

- Then - Juliano continues - your story has failed the second sieve as well. Let's go to the third, which is the sieve of Necessity: do you really think it's necessary to tell me this, or to pass it along?

- No, boss. Just from passing it through the sieve of these sieves, I can already see that nothing is left of what I was going to tell you - Olavo admits, taken aback.

- Exactly, Olavo. Have you ever thought how much happier people would be if everyone used these sieves? The next time a rumor comes your way, put it through the sieve of these three sieves - Truth, Kindness, Necessity - before giving in to the impulse to pass it along.

Remember:

Intelligent people talk about ideas.

Ordinary people talk about things.

Mediocre people talk about people.