

The Wise Worker Guards the Tongue

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Proverbs

There are more proverbs about the tongue than about any other topic.

Communication in some form is an integral part of nearly every job. In addition, social talk at work can improve working relationships, or damage them.

Gossip is an especially dangerous problem in the workplace. Gossip causes strife. It is a violation of trust. Gossip takes words out of context, misrepresents the intentions of the speaker, reveals what should have been kept in confidence, and attempts to elevate the gossiper at the expense of others who are not present to speak for themselves. It is not hard to see how destructive this can be in a workplace. Whether the gossip places a question mark over a person's reputation or the worth of a project or a position taken by a superior, the shadow cast by such words causes everyone around the gossiper to be more guarded and suspicious. This cannot help but inject division among workers, whether in an office, on a factory floor, or in an executive suite. Not surprisingly, St. Paul included gossip in his list of sins that are an abomination to God.

Unlike gossip, wise words bless other people. In the workplace we are often surrounded by anxious coworkers, and a good word may be just what they need.

In today's electronic workplace, the "tongue" isn't confined to our audible words. Gossip, lies, and angry words can travel at light speed through emails, blogs, tweets, and social media. We are called to be discerning, to recognize that death and life truly are in the words we use with or against one another in the workplace.