

SOUL TRAINING

A Day Without Gossip

Based on James Bryan Smith's "The Good and Beautiful Life"

Perhaps the most pervasive form of judgment is gossip. I define gossip as (1) speaking negatively (2) about someone who is not present. Those are the two elements of gossip. If you say something positive ("Brad got a promotion at work; he is such a hard worker"), or if the person is present ("Did you hear about Brad's promotion? Tell them, Brad, or do you want me to?"), it's not gossip. This week try to go one to three days without gossiping. Forgoing gossip for a single day can be challenging, but try to go for at least three days without saying anything negative about a person who is not present.

If you feel that something like that is too strong, (1) simply walk away when others are gossiping or (2) refuse to participate and change the subject as soon as you can. I have noticed that restraint inspires restraint. In other words, when we see someone refusing to gossip, it can remind us that gossip is wrong and help us to quit doing it right on the spot. My friend Matt Johnson finds this helpful: before gossip gets out of hand he alters the conversation by saying something positive about the person being attacked: "Well, I don't know Tom as well as you, but he appears to be a really generous person." According to Matt, this reframes the conversation and usually defuses the gossip.