



## Four Women Fired for Gossiping

### Idle Chatter Cost Four Seasoned Employees Their Jobs

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What happened in the town of Hooksett, N.H., is no rumor.

Four town employees with 46 years of service between them were fired, in part for gossiping and discussing rumors of an improper relationship between the town administrator and another employee that Hooksett residents now agree were not true.

The administrator complained, and after an investigation the town council fired the women, finding, "Gossip, whispering, and an unfriendly environment are causing poor morale and interfering with the efficient performance of town business."

"When I was given my termination papers, I just looked at the gentlemen that were present in the room and I said, 'You've got to be kidding!'" said fired worker Sandy Piper, who insisted her comments weren't out of line. "We discussed it on a lunch break, and then it ended."

"It kind of sort of was, 'Oh did you hear that too,'" said Michelle Bonsteel, Piper's fired co-worker.

Gossip is ingrained in American culture, from the elementary school playground to the office water cooler. But Tory Johnson, "Good Morning America's" workplace contributor, said people should be careful about what they say when they're on the clock.

"Free speech only goes so far," Johnson said. "An employer definitely has the right to defend his reputation."

In Hooksett the four firings are ironically now the talk of the town. But for the women out of work, the controversy is not a matter of idle chatter -- they want to get back to work.

"I did love my job. And do I want to return? Absolutely," Piper said.

Lawyers for the Town Council of Hooksett told ABC News they have "no comment" at this time, but there could be a decision this week on whether to reinstate some or all of the women.

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