

# Fighting the Office Rumor Mill During Tough Economic Times

By Jennifer Katus, PMP

Owner of [www.promomento.com](http://www.promomento.com), where you'll find gifts that inspire, stimulate, and reward project teams.

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It's no secret that the office rumor mill goes into hyperdrive when an economic downturn fuels fears of cutbacks, restructurings, and layoffs. As a manager you need to maintain momentum and ensure team performance despite the distraction of rumors. Your best bet is to get ahead of the rumors. Take control with an informed perspective. Use a proactive approach to address current rumors and prevent future ones. So LEAP to it!



**Learn.** Step up your rumor patrol. Regularly ask your team what they have heard. Depending on the tone of your current situation and the openness of your team, you may want to collect information from individuals or small groups rather than your whole team at a meeting. Solicit rumor leads from your peers as well. Rumors have a way of spreading quickly between groups. Likewise, if you learn of a rumor that affects a group other than your own, tactfully let the manager of the group know.



**Evaluate.** Get underneath the rumor to really understand what fears and concerns it is generating. Also evaluate how far it has spread. All rumors matter, but some are more poisonous than others. The more dangerous the rumor, the faster you need to deal with it. Also keep a look out for anyone who seems to generate rumors for sport. These folks, although rare, are best dealt with in a closed door setting. A public acknowledgment of their rumors can fuel their fire.



**Address.** Use simple, direct language to address any rumor. Restate the rumor and label it a myth. Correct the rumor with fact. For an example of excellent rumor control, check out [www.fightthesmears.com](http://www.fightthesmears.com). It's best to correct rumors in a public setting with your whole team present. This approach prevents your correction from being distorted into another layer of rumor. It enables everyone to ask clarifying questions and allows everyone to hear the same response.

Avoid using an emergency meeting or an urgent email to correct a rumor. This kind of drama gratifies a rumor and can inspire more conversation about it, rather than less.

Once the rumor is corrected, give the rumor closure by moving on to other more important topics.



**Prevent.** Solicit your team in your quest to spread the truth by asking them to correct the rumor if it resurfaces. Ask them to notify you of any new rumors, so you can find out the truth and share it with them. Also ask your boss to keep you informed of any changes that could become fodder for rumors if they are not communicated properly.

Rumors are more prevalent in environments where inter-personal competition is stiff. You can create an environment that is less hospitable to rumors by fostering rapport as a means to reward. Make sure you acknowledge teamwork as well as solitary achievements.

Rumors, like office politics, can never be totally eliminated. However with a sound rumor control method and a proactive approach, you can mitigate the risks that rumors introduce.

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About the author: Jennifer Katus, MBA, PMP, is owner of Promomento ([www.promomento.com](http://www.promomento.com)), where you'll find gifts that inspire, stimulate, and reward project teams. Jennifer applies her experience as a program manager and consultant to help her clients motivate change, boost morale, celebrate success, and express gratitude.