

## Do We Reveal The Past?

Suppose you discover some upsetting things about a colleague's past. Maybe the person committed a crime, or did something that led to a firing, or a demotion. Whatever it was, it was somehow dishonorable or simply embarrassing. What should you do? Do you have an obligation to make it known in the present? After all, it is the truth. Do you feel that the colleague is "hiding something and shouldn't get away with it?" Do you feel that if you ignore it, then you have to justify ignoring it? How do you approach this situation? Do you think about detraction? While there may be many ways to approach this as a good colleague, maybe the following considerations can suggest a reasonable path.

One consideration is whether or not the past event is having an effect in the present. Is the effect good or bad? If it is bad, will making the past known improve the present situation? Or will it make it worse?

Another issue is whether or not the colleague has made an effort to satisfy any ethical debt he/she may have incurred in the past. If damage was done to someone, have they been compensated in some manner by the colleague? If direct reimbursement wasn't possible, was there another approach, maybe giving to a charity, or performing community service, or maybe just regrets and new resolutions?

Has the colleague been on a good and honorable path ever since? Does she/he make an honest effort to be a good employee and a decent coworker? If you have questions, are you able to discuss them with the colleague privately? Maybe he/she has done the honorable thing after the transgression and has no debt.

Considering these issues will help you make up your mind. Collegial ethics generally proposes that past events in a person's life are not automatically relevant in the present. In fact, making known negative events from the past without good reason makes you a detractor, an injurer of someone's value, reputation and future. A detractor can rob all of us of the benefit and good deeds that the colleague may provide in the present and future. Also, who are we to judge? The saying of "judge not lest ye be judged" comes to mind.

Is the person "hiding" something? Well, maybe yes, and there is nothing wrong with it. There is nothing wrong with putting the past behind you and trying to be a model colleague today and tomorrow. In fact it is the collegial thing to do.

On some rare occasions, you may discover that a colleague has a continuing pattern of inappropriate behavior that damages others. In that case, a different approach may be needed.