

Too much information. I really don't like having too much information sometimes.....

It all started innocently enough. I had stopped by the office on a Saturday morning to pick-up my cell phone. Due to organizational restructuring everyone in my department had been really swamped and my desk reflected that. Somehow the phone had gotten 'lost' in the piles. After ransacking my apartment and car I had managed to catch a co-worker still in the office early Friday evening. I couldn't believe I would have done something as uncharacteristic as leave my phone there, but sure enough, while Helen had gone over to my cubicle and I called the phone (praying that I had left the ringer on!) she was able to find it amidst the mess. So the weekend wasn't off to the best start – spending 30 minutes commuting into work, when I wasn't working, was not my ideal way to spend a beautiful fall Saturday morning.

I had zipped through security and upstairs to my department, grabbed the phone, studiously ignored the overflowing In Box and was ready to get out of dodge. But then I decided to grab a soda for the ride home. So innocent, such an ultimate bad call!

As I power walked towards the staff 'lounge' I heard my manager, Peter's voice. A nice enough guy although he wasn't the sharpest knife in the drawer. He was also a HUGE talker – and not a very engaging one. I really did not want to run into him and get stuck having an hour-long conversation about this, that and whatever, on my weekend time, when I heard who he was talking to.

Anne was the regional manager who came in sporadically. Her visits were never pleasant for our department. She was one of those people, who didn't do the day-to-day, hands-on stuff, yet always had some 'great' new idea to implement for better productivity. Her ideas generally resulted in lots of busy work, which took time away from actual work, and did not affect productivity positively whatsoever. Her idea to re-file everything by color code rather than client name had given almost everyone a stroke. No one could quite figure out why she was still employed let alone why she was 'in charge' of us.

And she was technically our boss's boss. Not good.

So when I heard her voice too, I stopped short and tried to figure out if I could just turn around and escape unnoticed. Listening to her extol her latest brainstorm was about the last thing I wanted.

Then I heard Peter say, with uncharacteristic worry in his voice, "But HALF the department. Do you know what that means? How am I supposed to meet quota with half a staff? What rationale do I use? The holidays are coming up....."

"The clients will be divvied up between the remaining staff, so you're not losing clients. Your people will just have to be more organized. I have several new ideas from a training session on ways to motivate staff and –"

"You're talking in circles here. With all the other cutbacks and restructuring we're already stretched thin. When is this going into effect? Who authorized this?" Peter actually sounded on top of it and pretty forceful for a change. Normally he just coasted by in his staff's work. And despite the universal dislike for Anne, Peter was usually very deferential to her.

"Look, we're in a recession, official or not, like it or not. The powers that be need to cut costs and this is the plan. You have until Thanksgiving to make your

recommendations for who to keep and who to lose. It's your call, but remember the board's been getting a lot of pressure about women and minorities."

WOW. Half our department staff?! I was barely breathing as I stealthily walked backwards down the hallway. I heard Peter start to say something about the holidays as I turned a corner and then took the stairs and got out of the building as fast as I could.

I was pretty sure my position was solid. I was the only person who spoke fluent Italian in the department and we had a substantial base of Italian clients. While most of them could speak English well enough, they could be a volatile group and they liked being catered to. They comprised a big enough chunk of the sales revenue that I didn't think it likely our company, despite all its cutbacks, would risk alienating them. I was also a woman and apparently that was finally a plus too.

I got in my car, clutching my retrieved cell and immediately started to call – who, who did I actually want to call..... I stopped scrolling through my address book. This was the kind of news that could really snowball and start a panic. I did not want to be the person to start that. I hadn't heard the entire conversation and while I couldn't quite see how it could not be as bad as it sounded, you never know. Office friends and office loyalty are funny things. People definitely have different work and personal life personas.

All of a sudden another car pulled in the lot next to me. It was George, who worked in imports. A quiet, nondescript kind of guy who kept to himself. I'd sat next to him at a Christmas Party last year and found he was not at all as dull or in his own world, as he appeared on the surface. I rolled down my window.

"Hey, Melissa, what are you doing here on a Saturday?"

"Left my cell phone and couldn't survive the weekend without it. Kind of sad." I replied. Should I tell him? He's in a different department, maybe he knows something?

"Yeah, I know how that goes. I'm taking a long weekend next week and wanted to make sure I have everything all set up to run smoothly while I'm AWOL. Things have been a little tense around here."

"Hmmm," I semi-muttered as I feigned searching through my purse. I really felt like telling someone what I'd overheard. Share the stress.

"So, anyone up there today I should worry about running into?"

"Well, actually.....Peter and Anne were talking outside the break room. I managed to avoid them, but heads up."

"Peter here on the weekend? Is his golf course under construction or something? And Anne? In town and here on a Saturday? That's weird."

"Yeah, they seemed to be in kind of an intense conversation, so I kept out of their way."

"Wonder what's going on? Nothing good." He looked expectantly at me.

"I'm not sure....." Should I tell him? I'd really like another person's input. "It seemed like they were talking about more layoffs....." There I'd said it. In a very vague way. Was lightning about to strike me?

"MORE layoffs. Wow. Not good. Any names? Which department?"

Should I fish? "I just overheard a little and may have gotten it wrong, but I think they were referring to one of the overseas divisions, but who knows." OK that didn't make ANY sense and he's sure to realize that. Why would Peter and Anne be talking about overseas layoffs? He's looking at me funny now. "Please don't quote me on this. I don't want to start any big rumors or anything."

“Sure, of course. It’s always good to have some insider knowledge. I’d heard sales were down and wondered.... They keep looking for some kind of magic bullet solution.”

Sales down? Not according to what I knew. They weren’t up, breaking any records, but they’d been steady – nothing to sneeze at. Huh. More to contemplate.

“Yeah, well, I should go. Places to go and people to see and all that.” I smiled, half waved and made to put my car in reverse.

“OK, have a good one.”

As I drove away I wondered if I’d just made a really big mistake. I hadn’t said much but what I’d said wasn’t really true.....

Much later I was able to look back and realize how my ‘innocent’ remarks had inadvertently started a complete panic.