

# Your Personal Coach

By  
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**A woman at work acts like she likes me to my face, but I've heard from some other co-workers that she puts me down when I'm not around. My co-workers made me swear that I wouldn't tell her that they told me what she's doing. She's hurt my feelings and makes me so mad I'm ready to quit, but I really need the job. I'm not good at confronting people. What should I do?**

**-- Patty T.**

Dear Patty,

It's hard enough to work with negative people, but those who act one way with you, and another when you're not there can poison the atmosphere at work, or in any social setting.

Two-faced people cause us to question our ability to read people, and leave us feeling betrayed if we trusted their friendship.

I'm assuming that the co-workers who told you about this woman's behavior are reliable and trustworthy. If they, themselves, are negative or trouble-makers you would be best to ignore their comments, and assess the situation yourself.

Carefully observe. Does this woman put others down in your presence and then act friendly to them? If so, there's a good chance that she may be doing this with you, too.

This kind of negative behavior happens far too often in work-groups, so make a decision now that you will not tolerate it yourself, that you will not cooperate—even by your silence--when anyone talks behind someone else's back to you.

You can be a leader in helping your organization to become kinder and more authentic by simply not participating in negative, hurtful behavior.

That's a good strategy for the future, but for now, there are steps you can take to clear the air and make work a more comfortable place for you to be.

If these co-workers are telling the truth, then it's important for you to take some action. I'm not suggesting an angry confrontation, but you will have to work up the courage to be appropriately assertive with this woman if you don't want to go to work each day feeling angry, with your guts in a knot.

Your letter suggests that dealing with this woman face-to-face might feel somewhat scary to you. Most women in our society have had very few role models of appropriate assertive behavior so the thought of "confronting" someone is uncomfortable for lots of us. But, I promise, your work life will be so much better and you will be more empowered when you tell her how you feel.

Here's a plan: Ask to speak with her privately. Begin what you want to say with a positive or empathy statement. You might say something like, "You know, I enjoy

working with you but...” (Positive). Or “I know that everyone has moments of being negative...” (Empathetic).

Patty, it’s very important that whatever statement you choose to begin this conversation is true. Don’t just make up something positive to say to her if you don’t believe it.

Then firmly and clearly tell her that you have heard that she is saying negative things about you behind your back. Tell her that it makes it hard to trust her now. Directly say that you want her to stop it.

There is a good chance that this woman may deny your charges or demand to know who told you that bunch of lies. There is no reason to go down this path with her. Just say again, firmly, that you have heard this from several people and that you are feeling hurt and angry. Say again, that you want this to stop.

You might think of your assertive communication to this woman to include three steps:

- A positive or empathy statement (again, only if you can say something positive or empathetic that is TRUE!).
- The assertive message that tells her what you have heard from reliable people and expresses your feelings (e.g., “I’ve heard from several sources that you put me down when I’m not around and that makes me angry and hurt.”)
- An action statement (e.g., “If you have any problems with me, please come to me directly. But I want this to stop.”)

Make sure your non-verbal behaviors are in sync with your words. Make direct eye contact, use a firm tone of voice but don’t yell, stand or sit up straight, and feel your own personal empowerment. You have the right – indeed, the responsibility – to protect yourself. And although you do not have the power to change anyone but yourself, you’ll feel better when you stand up for yourself.

*Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direction questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949*

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