

Dear Mary Pat: How Can I Stop Staff From Comparing Salaries?

☒ You probably can't.

But that doesn't mean I haven't been guilty of trying to in the past. I have typically had a policy in my personnel handbook saying staff can be terminated for discussing wages. But should you really follow through with that threat? Some managers probably have, but I wonder if it is just a convenient excuse to terminate an employee. I would not terminate an employee because s/he did something that is so, well, human.

Employees are going to talk and most will compare wages because they are anxious to know if they are being treated fairly or if someone else in a comparable job is making more per hour. Fair is a word I formerly hoped would be used to describe me as a manager, but the longer I work managing staff, the less I really believe there is a "fair." There is no absolute fair in my mind because it is very difficult to treat two people exactly the same. No two people have exactly the same training, experience and talents, or attitude, so trying to place an exact value on their services is difficult. Each of us believes we bring something special to the job, but how does one assess that quality?

The best that can be done, I believe, is to be ready to justify and defend why you are paying any staff member what you are paying them. Be ready for that question, as it is sure to come.

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