

heard . . . no, why . . . well, it doesn't surprise me . . . he had it coming to him . . . of course, this is confidential . . ."

Conversation is a big part of our psychological environment. Some conversation is healthy. It encourages you. It makes you feel like you're taking a walk in the warm sunshine of a spring day. Some conversation makes you feel like a winner.

But other conversation is more like walking through a poisonous, radioactive cloud. It chokes you. It makes you feel ill. It turns you into a loser.

Gossip is just negative conversation about people, and the victim of thought poison begins to think he enjoys it. He seems to get a form of poisoned joy from talking negatively about others, not knowing that to successful people he is becoming increasingly unlikable, and unreliable.

One of these thought-poison addicts walked into a conversation some friends and I were having about Benjamin Franklin. As soon as Mr. Killjoy learned the topic of our chat, he came through with choice bits about Franklin's personal life, in a negative way. Perhaps it's true that Franklin was a character in some ways and he might have made the scandal magazines had they been around in the eighteenth century. But the point is, Benjamin Franklin's personal life had no bearing on the discussion at hand, and I couldn't help being glad that we weren't discussing somebody whom we knew intimately.

Talk about people? Yes, but stay on the positive side.

Let's make one point clear: Not all conversation is gossip. Bull sessions, shop talk, and just "batting the breeze" are necessary at times. They serve a good purpose when they are constructive. You can test your proneness to be a gossip by taking this test: