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4 ways to respond to nosy questions

BY TERAH SHELTON

YOU DON’T WANT TO BE RUDE, but sometimes questioners aren’t as considerate, asking questions that you shouldn’t have to answer! Short of fleeing the room every time you see one of these overly curious folks coming, what to do? “Don’t let their nosiness get you down,” says Melissa Leonard, an etiquette coach in Westchester, New York. Generally, it helps to anticipate personal questions and formulate canned answers that contain the information you are willing to share. Certain questions require candor, others wit—and some don’t have to be answered at all. Here, ideas for how to respond politely to a few uncomfortable queries.

A coworker asks why you’ve been missing so many days recently or what the boss wanted to see you about.

TRY THIS Opt for a short-and-sweet response, says Leonard, since acting mysterious or secretive will only cause more idle chatter. Say something like, “Oh, it is so nice of you to be concerned, but everything is fine,” or, “Thanks for checking up, but we were just reviewing the project I’ve been working on.”

AVOID revealing anything that you don’t want discussed at the watercooler or that could get you in trouble with your boss (such as that you’re job hunting).

Someone asks how much you paid for your car, house or recent vacation.

TRY THIS Nosy money questions are so rude that almost any polite shutdown is fair game. Try, “I’ve purposely forgotten!” Letitia Baldridge, author of New Manners for New Times, also suggests this go-to line: “I only know that whatever I paid, it was far too much, and whatever I earn, it’s far too little.”

AVOID giving an exact number. Leonard says that doing so may open a hornet’s nest later on if your friend asks you for money or if you buy her a gift (“Well, she could afford that car, but she skimped on my gift!”).

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