

If Someone Approaches Me to Ask About Someone Else, Am I Permitted to Give Negative Information?

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Question: If someone asks me for information about someone else, am I allowed to give them negative information?

Answer: If the advice is solicited from you, there is more room for leniency.

As we said previously, if someone didn't do anything wrong, it is forbidden to say something derogatory about him that may cause him harm, even if it will benefit someone else. The Chofetz Chaim explains that the reason for this is because you have to consider both people equally. You do not have a right to hurt one person in order to help another person; therefore, it is preferable to just remain silent.

On the other hand, if someone approaches you to ask for your advice – for example, he asks if an individual he is considering hiring is intelligent or not – it would be permitted to give him the information he is asking about, even if it is derogatory. Since this person is acting within his rights and is specifically seeking your help, you have to be more concerned about him than about the other person and you are allowed to take his benefit into consideration more than the benefit of the other person.

Question: What if you were to receive an automated email asking your opinion about your experience with a business or employee?

Answer: The Chofetz Chaim is speaking about a case where a person comes over to you to ask for information. This leniency would probably not apply in the case of an automatically generated email.