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Social Media In The Workplace

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MGT 360--Human Resource Management

Dr. Ball; Winter, 2015

Social Media has been a huge part of human interaction for decades now. It started back in 1969, when CompuServe launched their internet service to the United States. Then it slowly grew to email, and then in 1985 America Online (AOL) was founded. By 1997, AOL came out with the instant messenger, which gave America a tease of what would come in the future. From there tons of other social media sites emerged and the trend of documenting your every move on social media begun. Here is where the problem lies; often time’s people want to vent on social media about home, work, relationships or even experiences at different facilities that they go to. And while most feel it is their right to say whatever they want on social media, it can and will cost you your job.

According to Kit Eaton’s article, *If you’re applying for a job, censor your Facebook page*, 45% of employers are now using social media sites to screen potential employees. 35% of those employers who are screening via social media reported that they had rejected a candidate due to what they found. The top seven reasons why an employer would reject the individual are as followed:

* Provocative or inappropriate photos or info – 53%
* Drinking or drug use – 44%
* Bad-mouthing previous employee, colleague or client – 35%
* Poor communication – 29%
* Discriminatory comments – 26%
* Lied about qualifications – 24%
* Leaked confident info from previous job – 20%

Now while I do believe that most of those are completely understandable and in my opinion, common sense. I don’t think it’s completely fair for an employer to reject an individual’s application because of what they decide to put on ***their*** social media. Yes, in many ways it does represent you, however, if you want to post a picture of you and your family at the beach in your bikini; is that perceived as an inappropriate photo? Or if you comment on a picture/status and aren’t using correct terms or well punctuated and of writing; are they going to think you’re illiterate?

What I did find very intriguing from this same article was that the top three qualities that won over an employer: 38% said it was because the candidate was creative, 35% was thanks to “solid communications skills” and 33% was because it made candidates look “well rounded”. What really bothers me about this is that anybody can paint a pretty picture of themselves online. Anyone can ***say*** that this is how they would handle an issue, or this is their way of thinking or whatever it may be that they want to highlight about themselves; but as cliché as it sounds, it’s actions that speak louder than words. And in my opinion and experience, people only display what they want to. Most of the time, people are not going to bring attention to their negative qualities. Unless of course, they lack common sense. So using social media as a resource on whether or not this person is a good fit, can be misleading.

Have you ever been so excited about a new job opportunity that you went to your social media site and shared it with all of your friends and family? Well as innocent as that may sound, it could possibly cost you that job opportunity that you were so happy to have. An example from this article *Fired Before Your First Day*, Heather R. Huhman (2012) explains how an individual was excited about his new position and decided to announce it on his blog. Unfortunately, he used the company logo and due to the fact that he did not consult them prior to the post or ask for permission; he was fired before he even had a chance to show him his capabilities. I found this very interesting because most of us do share simple things like new opportunities, and accomplishments on our social media. We don’t always think through the repercussions that may follow. Especially something minor such as this example. The employer could have given the employee a heads up that there is a policy regarding social media and what they should or should not be saying or displaying because it reflects on the company. Their choice to fire the employee just because he used their logo on his blog without permission is irrational in my opinion. The entire situation could have been handled differently and this poor man’s job could have been secured.

The range of how employers are able to screen candidates now is pretty extensive. Not only do they lurk through all of your social media sites without you knowing but now they have the right to ask for your login and password information. Even though Facebook has stated that it violates the terms of services and even threatened to pursue legal actions for breaches. Which in return has made some refrain from that and just asking in the interview for the candidate to login right then and there. Besides that employers are using the information found to create a psychological profile of the individual. McGrath (2012). And others are employing software for facial recognition to mine web sites identifying people in their photos and videos. So in other words, someone may post a picture of you and may not even tag you in on it and this particular software would still be able to find and access it.

In order to attract employers Haefner recommends that you should do the following:

1. **DO** clean up digital dirt BEFORE you being your job search. Remove any photos, content and links that can work against you in an employer’s eyes.

2. **DO** consider creating your own professional group on sites like Facebook and Brightfuse.com to establish relationships with thought leaders, recruiters and potential referrals.

3. **DO** keep gripes offline. Keep content focused on the positive, whether that relates to professional or personal information. Make sure to highlight specific accomplishments inside and outside of work.

4. **DON’T** forget others can see your friends, so be selective about who you accept as friends. Monitor comments made by others. Consider using the “block comments” feature or setting your profile to “private” so only designated friends can view it.

5. **DON’T** mention your job search if you’re still employed.

Kit Eaton (2009). All of these are great points and a nice guideline for how to captivate employers to want you to work for them.

Social media can be used for numerous reasons, to keep in touch with family and friends, to keep up with news, trending topics, or even to sell items you no longer want. However, since social media has taken over person to person contact and interaction, one must be very careful about what they display to the world. Venting about your frustrations or just simply stating your opinion (depending on the situation and your choice of words) can really hurt you more than it can benefit you. People must realize that the content of their social media sites are a representation of them as an individual and can often give people the wrong impression. And if there was ever a time to be extra cautious about what you share on your social media, it is now! Technology is growing by the day and if you want to be able to grow as a professional than you need to start with your social media sites first. Follow the do’s and don’ts stated in the paper and you should be golden.