Solutions for Supervisors

from your

Affiliated Employee Assistance Program

A publication provided by your organization/s EAP (Employee Assistance Program) to help you with common employee dilemmas and/or problems.

August 2011

QUESTION:

How do social networking technologies like Facebook and Twitter impact our employees and organization? What, as a supervisor, is it important for me to pay attention to?

ANSWER:

According to a report published by Nucleus Research, **77%** of employees have a Facebook account and one in every 33 employees built their entire profile at work because they are part of the 6% of users who never access Facebook from anywhere but work. **Nearly two-thirds** of users access their Facebook accounts at work and the majority of them are unable to identify any work-related reasons for doing so. In fact, some employees report spending as much as **two hours a day** on Facebook.

In 2010, the Commissioner of Human Resources for the State of Vermont reported that internet use dropped 25% (2,300 hours or 57 full-time positions) in the first week that a new program designed to monitor the web viewing habits of employees was implemented.

At the same time, social networking is legitimately being used for work-related promotional and networking reasons. Obviously, the ways in which businesses communicate with customers, vendors, and employees has radically changed in the last two decades. The very recent increase in the use of social networking tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instant Messaging (IM), blogging, LinkedIn and others continue to present opportunities and challenges for organizations. Many industry experts point to the power of these tools for developing and cultivating relationships with customers and business partners, creating more positive connections between employees, and marketing products and services.

Consider the example of a team leader who decided to give the go ahead to an employee who pitched the idea of utilizing Facebook and Twitter as part of a marketing/community relations plan. Upon further reflection, she started to wonder about the possible negative implications of her decision. Might it affect job performance and productivity? If employees are spending more time on social networking sites for business, it could be pretty tempting to spend more personal time on these sites as well. She also began to wonder how employees (who were more familiar with the technology than she was) might use it? How might it affect the organization's image?

Remember that EAP is here to help in any way that we can - call on us for consultation and assistance anytime!

Call 1-800-769-9819

Educational Programs for Supervisors

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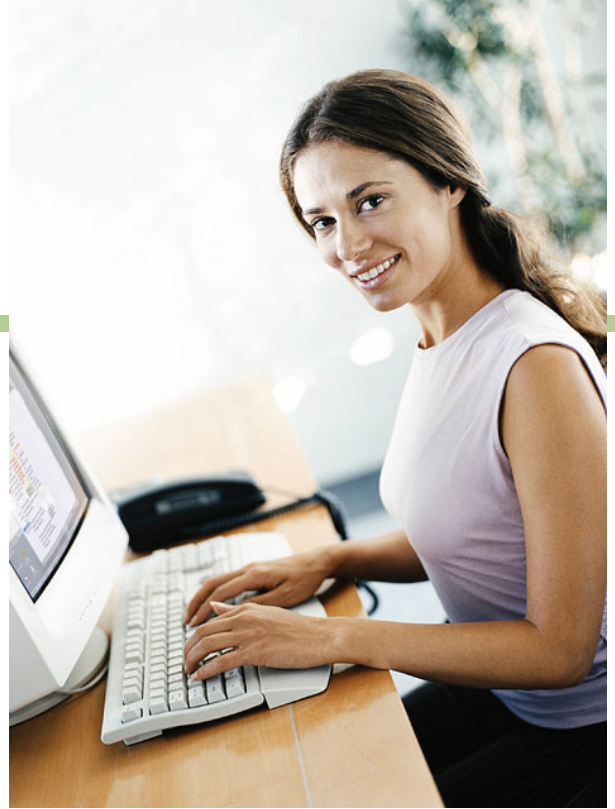
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A real strength of online networking is its ability to break down boundaries among different groups and individuals. However, sometimes boundaries are important—especially in the workplace. If a client/customer/patient sends a "friend" request to an employee's personal Facebook page, should the request be granted? What might be on the employee's personal page (or linked to an employee's personal page through a "friend" page) that could reflect badly on the company? What rights does an employer have to tell an employee what they can or cannot post?

Obviously, these new tools raise many questions and will continue to do so as they evolve. The degree to which this becomes an issue for employers depends on the industry and work culture. However, supervisors can be proactive about maximizing opportunities and minimizing risk by keeping informed and consistently communicating with management and supervisees about using social networking in the workplace.

- It is very important for employees to understand that if they access personal email or social networking sites on the organization's equipment, they are implicitly authorizing their employer to access that content as part of normal systems monitoring.

- Be sure that you and your supervisee have clearly defined how the use of social networking tools relate to the employee's specific job description and functions as well as specific goals and tasks. Consider how much time on these sites is expected given goals and tasks. Make sure that any activity is consistent with organizational policies.

- Ensure that you and your staff are aware of and conversant on company policies regarding internet usage. This may be an opportune time to review existing policies with employees and to address with management or HR if the policy is unclear or needs updating. Are there clearly delineated guidelines regarding business-related use versus personal use at work? Does the policy specifically address expectations about online behavior and content? Most organizations expect that when employees go on business trips that they will conduct themselves professionally since they are representatives of the organization. Is it clearly articulated that the same

is expected when they are representing the organization online? What about expectations pertaining to employees who identify themselves as part of the organization on their personal social networking sites?

- While it is important that employees conduct themselves appropriately online when representing their employer, supervisors must also be respectful of employees' personal boundaries and rights to privacy when they are using sites for personal uses on their own time. It is a balancing act.

The technology landscape is obviously fluid and will continue to be so. Employers must be flexible and continue to educate themselves about technology in the workplace. But whether it is in the virtual or real world, practicing core supervisory and management skills are essential. EAP can be a resource to the supervisor for consultation and for the employee to address specific concerns related to the use of technology for job performance and personal reasons.

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