

TECHNOLOGY AND EMPLOYEES

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No one will argue that technology has created efficiencies in both our business and personal lives. Entire generations have now grown up relying on technology to communicate, for entertainment, managing their financial affairs, gathering and storing information, and finding work. More and more people feel their iPhone, iPod, Blackberry's, etc. are an extension of who they are. Some just have to be connected all the time. Without them, they would not know what to do. A recent article I read indicated that according to YouGov, "42 percent of office workers between the ages of 18 and 29 discuss work-related issues on blogs and social networking sites." The question is how much of this is done while on their personal time or while at work.

Using technology has increased efficiency, streamlined processes and enabled mass communication, to name a few. However, today's employees are staying personally connected while at work or sharing work information and frustrations using social networks. Employees are texting or staying caught up through their social network pages. This can also include taking and sending photos, etc. All this and more causes most employers concerns over what to do. Some of the questions employers are struggling with include:

What activities do you regulate?

How do you regulate when employees can do this?

How do you regulate where employees can do this?

How much time would you consider acceptable?

What if it is adversely impacting an employee's productivity?

What if it is impacting customers or customer service standards?

What if employee communications are derogatory, disparaging, or a damaging "vent," or contrary to company policies?

If employees use a business' computer or communicate while "on the clock," who owns the information?

What if employees are off the clock?

Who monitors these sites or employee activities?

What if you learn about concerning information on social networking sites, how do you react and what can you do?

The list could go on and on. The answers are not simple or straight forward. Employment law has quickly been developing over the past year and is continually being redefined. So, what do you do?

Creating a social media policy which outlines your expectations is a good way to get started. Once this is in place, communicate it and reference its importance many times. This is one of those policies I encourage employers to over communicate. Education is the key. Employees should know this like they know when they get paid. Your managers' buy-in is critical as they have the job of enforcing the policy in their daily interactions with employees. Reinforcing this policy and your expectations are essential and especially important as you make difficult employment decisions based on employee actions.

Creating a social media policy should be done in conjunction with the review of other policies which communicate your work standards. These include your code of conduct, internet use, use of company property/equipment, proprietary or confidential information dissemination, and others which speak to how you conduct business and where. Make sure these are up to date and clearly state your expectations and actions if they are violated. Last, but not least, don't forget to consult your legal advisor to make sure any policy is in compliance with current regulations and laws.

As a small employer this task may seem daunting, however, it is necessary to protect what you have built. Although I would like to believe that professionalism and common sense will prevail, I know we are all human and, depending on the circumstances in our lives, we make choices. This type of a policy helps to protect you when those choices have the potential to create a business liability.

If you need assistance developing a social media policy, call Human Resource Consulting, LLC at 763-370-4280. I would love to discuss your needs and how I might be able to help.