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OEO News

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Kim D. Kirkland, Ed.D., Director

In a Civil Workplace: Navigating Social Media

Third in a three-part series

"We may not always agree...but when we disagree, we are called to respond with civility." ~ IUPUI Civility Statement

There's no denying the popularity of social networking. In the shadow of social media giants like Facebook and Twitter, the grandchildren of Six Degrees and Myspace, emerges the next generation of 24/7 "what I think this very minute" posting sites.

Cucumbertown connects cooks; Lafango lets us share unlimited media and create electronic press kits; and Zooppa links creative talent to brand and agency advertising projects. Pew Research indicates that three out of four college graduates belong to a social network.¹

In the crush of new social media forums, how should we conduct ourselves in the potentially public, potentially forever venues?



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While researching social media "etiquette" and online civil behavior, OEO found sometimes conflicting advice for there are as many "rules" for online communication as there are opinions.

Huffington Post writer Jenna Wawrzyniec suggests "...my No. 1 'rule' for social media etiquette is this: Share what you want to share, engage how often you want to engage, unapologetically be yourself..."²



But whether using social media for personal or professional purposes, the opportunity to share thoughts and express opinions grows by gigabytes per second and, unfortunately, so does the opportunity to virtually misstep. Posting every-thing-you-think-the-minute-you-think-it, complete with expressive selfies, could present future challenges as the material may be accessed by friends, foes, current and potential employers, teachers, even your grandmother.

Krista Hoffmann-Longtin, Ph.D., assistant professor of Communication Studies and

Social media etiquette issues increasingly pervade the workplace.

Dear OEO: I sent my co-workers "friend" invitations through Facebook and all but one accepted. Should I ask the one who didn't accept if he overlooked the invitation? It bothers me because I know he's friends with the others. –Feeling Rejected

Dear Rejected: Not everything is personal, your colleague may have his reasons and they may have nothing to do with you. Move on and say nothing.

Dear OEO: During my last performance evaluation, someone wrote that my business Twitter responses are often RUDE!! I don't have time for chit-chat, I like direct, one-word responses that get to the point. How can I avoid the perception of being brusque? – Curt on Campus

Dear Curt: Unfortunately, one word answers, words in all caps, and omitting courtesy language may often be taken as anger or rudeness. The same commonsense, respectful behavior applies in social media as in person, maybe even more so as your voice and tone is left open to interpretation. While time may be short, are a few extra seconds worth offending someone? If you don't have time to be civil, maybe you should forego the tweet.

assistant dean in the IU School of Medicine Office of Faculty Affairs and Professional Development defines etiquette as behavior that shows respect and allows another person to feel comfortable. With this definition in mind, she offers three considerations when communicating through social media.

Permanence. An electronic history doesn't go away it just gets longer, eventually constructing our "brand" Hoffmann-Longtin said. We construct an online chronology of where we were, mentally and physically, for any given time.

Posting only positive aspects of one's life can inhibit personal growth. For example, "if you commit yourself to only positive online posts it may interfere with your personal reflection, growth, and the ability to be who you really are," says Hoffmann-Longtin. "At the same time, it can be damaging to be entirely negative, too."

Pace. "At times we need to think really deeply about how what we say affects other people," says Hoffmann-Longtin who, in her Twitter feed, likes to use the hashtag "#wordsmatter". But online communication encourages "reactive behavior" and in a high-speed internet nanosecond, if not cautious, a person's words can be carried around the globe never to be "un-written".

Perceived anonymity. It's easier to say harsh things when we don't know the other person's identity or when we think they can't identify us. But regardless of whether someone can identify a poster or blogger we have a responsibility to be kind, says Dr. Hoffmann-Longtin.

She suggests that after considering whether or not we would say, face-to-face, what we just keyboarded *and* whether we would want the words to hang around indefinitely, only then

should we launch the thought-put-to-writing into the online jet stream.

Conversely and equally important is how one interprets the meaning of others' messages. Professor Hoffmann-Longtin says that we may perceive meaning when that meaning might not exist. In other words, don't be too quick to judge or react. When faced with something you may find reactionary at first glance, she suggests asking yourself, "Can I let this go?" and if the answer is "yes", then let it go.



OEO's web site contains a link to the university's policy regarding social media stating that if the material equates to harassment or bullying and is conducted within the IUPUI community, disciplinary action could result. And in the case of threats, criminal charges may result. An "anonymous" mobile app post that worried University of Missouri faculty and students resulted in charges of terrorism³ and three people were taken for questioning as part of a federal investigation of cyber threats to local schools.

It may help to remember that civility is treating others as we would like to be treated, in person or in cyber space.

Sources and resources

¹http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/?beta=true&utm_expid=53098246-2.Ll4CFSVQG2jphsg-Koplg.1&utm_referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.businessknowhow.com%2Finternet%2Fsocialmediaetiquette.htm

²http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jenna-wawrzyniec/the-social-media-etiquett_b_8517922.html

³<http://www.businessinsider.com/yak-yak-social-media-threats-2015-11>

⁴<http://www.businessknowhow.com/internet/socialmediaetiquette.htm>
<http://www.amazon.com/So-Youve-Been-Publicly-Shamed/dp/1501231847>
https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together?language=en

For a copy of Dr. Hoffmann-Longtin's discussion forum guidelines, send a request to: ekempski@iupui.edu

To help readers avoid social media missteps, *OEO*News compiled the following suggestions:

- Review the university's information technology policy for downloading and net surfing <http://policies.iu.edu/policies/categories/information-it/IT-28.shtml>
- Set up separate email addresses for professional and social networking sites, but show respect and decorum in all online venues
- Be respectful – if your post is not something you would say face-to-face or is something you wouldn't want your parent, child, boss, etc. to read it might not be a good idea
- Never post when you are tired, intoxicated, frustrated, or angry
- Offer valuable information and don't "over-post"
- Don't be too quick to judge or react – show patience and kindness and don't assume others are interacting maliciously
- Don't post a photo of someone else without his or her permission
- Don't "friend" strangers for marketing purposes; check out those who want to "follow" or be your friend.⁴