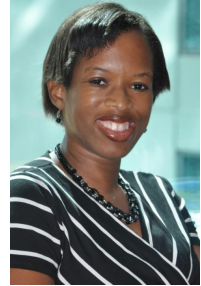


Photo of author: Dixie Ann Belle



Title: Managing Your Online Presence

Question: *Dear AFETT,* Recently, one of my co-workers made a passing comment about some pictures I had up on my FB profile. I could be going crazy, but since then I feel as if some of my co-workers are treating me differently. This is my personal profile! It has nothing to do with work. I do not think that they have any right to tell me what I should or should not post on my profile. I'm upset that they had the nerve to. What should I do?

~ Pissed Off

Dear *Pissed Off*,

When social media first launched, it was simply a way to connect with friends and colleagues. Overtime, these platforms have evolved to become so much more, especially when it comes to our reputations. One of the side effects of this evolution is the blurring of our personal and professional lives. Nowadays, it's quite possible for co-workers to have insight into your family and personal life, or even what you had for Sunday lunch.

While your online profile is your personal space, employers often conduct online searches of potential candidates before making a final selection – all the more reason why it is important for you to determine who sees what. Opinionated public posts made by employees of a company can have damaging effects on an organization's reputation. Consider an employee who posts racist remarks or an affiliation to a political party. Since the employee is associated with the company, it leaves them open to accusations of holding similar views and this could lead to damaging consequences. Just recently, an American employee was fired for posting a photo of herself making an obscene gesture at the presidential motorcade. While your situation appears to be quite different and not abusive towards anyone, you need to bear in mind that simply saying that your personal profile has nothing to do with your company, does nothing to stop co-workers from viewing or commenting on your photos. For better or worse your social media "life" can affect your professional reputation, so it is worth ensuring that you manage your personal profile in ways that minimise any negative impact on your career.

Here are some suggestions to consider.

Know your company's social media policy

Many companies have a social media policy in place, especially in light of social media's pervasive qualities. Companies must protect their brand, and these policies ensure that there are clear guidelines for

employees to follow, so that the brand is not placed in jeopardy. Often, these policies require that employees specifically state that their views are not necessarily that of the company should they post their opinions on controversial topics, or it may even advise against “friending” co-workers and suppliers on social media. Find out if your company has a social media policy and review it to see if you might in violation of any part of it.

Do a social media audit

You’ve witnessed first-hand how personal posts can disrupt your work life. Even if your company doesn’t have a social media policy in place, it’s in your best interests to act pre-emptively and assess what you have available for public viewing. Do a google search of your name and see what comes up. Take an objective look at anything with your name attached or ask for the opinion of a trusted friend. If you find anything that might be viewed negatively, you may need to start cleaning up your online presence.

Consider doing a social media clean-up

Go over your posts, tweets, blogs and photos. Look for posts with drug references or profanity, etc. Take a look at the pictures your co-worker noticed. Is there anything about them that might be interpreted as a pattern of poor judgement? Hopefully your workplace won’t be put off by a few pictures with a drink in your hand, but be mindful of what might be considered in a negative light.

Review your privacy settings on social media. Facebook gives you the option to keep selected posts private. You may want to restrict certain types of posts to only close friends. “Untag” yourself from potentially damaging photos made by friends and family. You can also make certain social media accounts completely private, and you can delete posts which may not portray you in the best light. Perhaps you wrote a blog once that no longer reflects your beliefs? Control what you put out there, so those who don’t have your best interests at heart will have less material to use against you.

Consider “unfollowing” co-workers

Unless you have a personal friendship with co-workers outside of work, it might be a good idea not to connect with them on Facebook. Just as you would not share all the details of your personal life at work, there is also no need to give others access to everything you post on social media.

If you still feel the need to connect, this is the perfect time to create a Facebook list of co-workers who will only be granted access to certain content on your feed.

Cultivate your more professional side

Counteract the way your co-workers view you by cultivating the professional side of your social media presence. Build that brand! Having a LinkedIn profile is not absolutely necessary, but you can use it to showcase your career and your interests. If you choose this route, use as many LinkedIn options as you can to make your profile effective and beneficial. Employ it to illustrate who you are in your profession. Use your public posts on other social media for this as well. Share thought-provoking articles and make objective comments on important issues. Let the public see more of your professional side.

Hopefully, taking these steps can help offset any negative connotations that may have arisen from your co-worker’s comment. Continue to be professional in your work life, and people will remember this when they think of you. Instead of letting your online presence handicap you, take control, and turn your best face to the world. Not only will this help in your current job, but it could prove to be beneficial as you advance your career.

Good luck!

AFETT

AFETT is a not-for-profit organisation formed in 2002 with the goal of bringing together professional women and engaging in networking opportunities, professional training and business ideas. ASK AFETT is a column meant to address issues and concerns of professionals seeking advice to assist in progressing in their careers. Today's response was written by AFETT member and former board member, Dixie-Ann Belle, a freelance social media content producer, writer, editor and proofreader with over a decade of experience. Learn more about AFETT at www.afett.com, search for AFETT Events on Facebook, follow us @AFETTEXECs on Twitter or contact us at 354-7130. Email us your career-related questions at admin.afett@gmail.com.