

Social Networking in the Workplace: 7 Issues to Consider

Welcome to the world of Web 2.0! If you find yourself wondering what the social networking world of Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn means for Human Resources, following are some things for you to consider.

Private Detective

Some employers are using social networking sites as a part of their background investigation for pre-hire screening. Beware! The rules around this are not clear. It is sure to be an emerging area of employment law. Perhaps soon there will be a case before recently confirmed Justice Sotomayor regarding the extent of an applicant's privacy rights on restricted sites! Consider asking applicants to sign a waiver to give authorization.

TMI (Too Much Information)

So, you decided to go there and research the applicant's Facebook page. Silly applicant, he just confirmed you as a Friend. You might find out more about him than you cared to know! You may, for instance, read about medical conditions or religious beliefs. Now you've just discovered some landmines to tip-toe around to avoid a discrimination charge.

Company Confidentiality

Of great concern among employers is the potential for an easy leak of sensitive information via social networking sites. The Marine Corps this month issued an administrative directive banning the use of the Marine network for accessing these sites. The Pentagon is said to be reviewing its rules as well. Expect to see more public and private employers to follow suit with policies that ban communicating confidential information via social networking sites.

Bandwidth

Employers are also concerned about the use of company computers and networks. Social networking sites in this regard are an extension of personal email and general internet usage. Use of company resources including capacity on the network costs real money. Consider the drain that employers experienced on the day of the Michael Jackson tribute due to streaming video. Social networking sites have added to the frequent personal usage of the internet for many employees.

Put Pencil to Paper

Don't forget to amend your Employee Handbook and/or Personnel Policies to cover this topic. Whatever you decide to do make sure your policy is clear, concise, and can withstand legal scrutiny!

What's Good for the Goose...

You just communicated that the company has amended the Internet Usage policy to ban the use of social networking sites at work, and the Marketing department follows up the same week with an announcement that they have launched a company Facebook page. Yeah! Employers should consider carefully the mixed message of using the tools for good (reaching potential customers) but banning the same tools from employees.

You're Fired!

What do you do when you find out an employee sent a Tweet about her lousy boss, or posted video on MySpace from the company holiday party of the CEO dancing on a tabletop after a few too many? You will be wise to consult with an attorney before taking a negative employment action based on information obtained on a social networking site.

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