Social Media – Threat or Opportunity?

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Social media is fast becoming a mainstream source of news, information and social interaction, bringing with it new challenges, and opportunities for HR professionals. Recent headlines demonstrate what a minefield social media can be for employees and employers, particularly in blurring the distinction between personal and professional conduct. These challenges often lead to a policy driven reaction. Such an approach, however, is a missed opportunity in realizing the full range of benefits social media can offer, and creates a significant risk of your social media policy becoming a stand alone policy which has little effect on the behavior of your employees.

With this in mind, whether reviewing existing language, or creating a new policy, the following questions are intended to help you consider a more pro-active approach to managing your employees' use of social media:

1. *Involvement*. Who else in the organization has a vested interest in this topic? Is there a strategic partnership that could be of mutual benefit? How will you engage your employees? Is there an opportunity for their input? Could a social media committee be useful to your organization?   How will you ensure this is a 'living' policy that stays current despite the constantly evolving nature of the subject matter?

2. *Content*: Does your policy reflect your organization's values, both in content and style of communication? What does the policy say about you as an employer? What management style does it project? In researching this topic for a client recently, I came across many examples of social media policies. What struck me most was how the tone of the different policies made me feel about each organization as employer. The style of language ranged from controlling and heavy handed, to trusting and empowering, showing a desire to build on the opportunities offered by the technology available. Who would you rather work for?

3. *Integration*. Are you cross-referencing related policies such as your standards of conduct, anti-harassment and ethics policies? How are you making the policy relevant to your employees? Is there any follow up training to communicate your policy to the organization? If training is in place, does it focus on the principles behind the policy rather than just what not to do? Are you using real life examples to make your points relevant?

By taking a positive and pro-active approach to your social media policy, you can not only limit the risks to your organization, but also create opportunities for your organization and employees to benefit from all social media has to offer.