

# Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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### Social Media: Should it be Restricted in the Workplace?

MGD Enterprises, a [consulting company](#) I follow on Facebook presents a business question or piece of advice daily. Today's comment was "Fact for Friday...Is access to social media critical to employee satisfaction? A global survey of workplace attitudes & behaviors by Clearswift shows that 21% of young adults say they would turn down a job if it didn't allow them access to social network sites or their person[al] email. What is the situation where you work?"



The first commenter said "That will be the same 21% that will complain about their raise because their lack of focus will lead to their lack of production." Those of you who know me well or follow this blog will know how I feel about that - to me, social media is not about wasting time and being unproductive. Which is why I responded to him that "I'd include myself in that 21%, but social media makes me more effective because I use it for my job - I network with people in my field through Twitter and publicize my firms and their accomplishments, and use LinkedIn and Facebook for the same reasons. I think when you have people abusing social

media, it's a human resources issues, not a tools issue. The same people who will waste time on social media would be on the phone making personal calls if they were restricted from it."

I am firm in my belief that this is the case - that anyone who is looking to waste time at work will find a way to do it - either taking one too many smoking breaks, talking on the phone too much, sending long personal emails, or whatever. But something I hadn't considered is what the next commenter pointed out - "The key differentiator is that a personal call, while interfering with productivity, is not recorded for all the world to see."

And there's the rub.

If someone is unhappy with a company or sharing confidential information on a phone call, the worst that can happen is that the person they're speaking to will repeat that information. But if an employee tweets about it, or posts it on their Facebook page, not only does that information get disseminated to every single person in their network, but it can also be retweeted or reposted endlessly. Then, suddenly it's a PR nightmare, much like [when Mr. Andrews from Ketchum complained about Memphis](#) via Twitter, the city where his client, FedEx, has their headquarters. Had he called his wife and said the same thing to her, no one would have been the wiser. But because he chose a public forum for his complaints, his client picked up on it and it's a gaffe that continues to live on both on the internet and in people's minds. Every time he tweets, I am reminded of it.

So what is the lesson here for law firms? Block as much social media as possible?

I say no. I think the answer is education. Although education can be expensive and time-consuming, I believe that social media is here to stay and can actually be an asset to firms when used correctly. So the key is to educate your employees on the ramifications of their online interactions and to have a plan for when the inevitable slip-up occurs. Marilyn Davidoff, the founder of MGD Enterprises, commented on her Facebook stream, saying "Companies are going to have to stay flexible as Social Media and its use in business evolves. It's a new issue, but goes back to basic values of respecting and trusting people and managing in a way that gets commitment rather than just compliance." I fully agree with her.

There was a time that I worked at a company that trusted none of their employees. We were micromanaged to such an extent that we were basically treated like high school interns, rather than the college graduates we were required to be to work there. I quit that job after 7 weeks because it was stifling and never inspired my best work - everyone there was doing the bare minimum to survive and fly under the radar. Now, I'm in a position where I have the freedom to explore opportunities for my company, where I'm encouraged to learn and grow both as a person and as an advocate for the organization, and it inspires loyalty and the commitment that Marilyn alludes to. That, in turn, keeps me always focusing on the positive messages in my social networking. Because I've also been witness to mistakes such as Mr. Andrews, I'm also cautious whenever I tweet or post something - that's where education is helpful.

What are your thoughts on this? Do you think social media should be blocked at your firms?  
How can you empower your employees, partners and associates instead of restricting them so  
that they use social media to enhance the firm's image?

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