COMMON SENSE, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE WORKPLACE:
THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE EXPLORED

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ABSTRACT

Since the mid-2000’s, involvement in social media spaces has seemingly become a requirement in the business community. Initially sparked by exponential growth among teens of high school and college age, regularly visiting websites including Facebook, MySpace and Twitter is now a daily habit for anyone of any age participating in the digital revolution.

These Web 2.0 sites are designed to connect users with “friends,” loosely defined as ranging from friends in the traditional sense to people one has only encountered online. These networks aim to maximize interaction among these connections, while placing put the individual’s profile completely under their own control, allowing them to disclose as much or as little personal information as they wish. As these profiles lead professionals to become more connected with colleagues and managers, a growing overlap in personal and professional lives is occurring, to the dismay and detriment of those finding themselves judged at work by what they have said or done on social networks.

In this thesis project, I have explored the impact of social networking on the reputations of professional adults, who typically already have a well-established identity
offline. Many adults typically have an existing network of personal and professional contacts based on education, work, and life experiences. How is this population adapting to these new social media spaces, and what are the implications for their lives and careers? What are the explicit and implicit guidelines, and the moral and ethical criteria that adults apply in these spaces in light of reputation concerns?

Through secondary research of books, articles and surveys on social networking in the workplace, and young people’s use of the Internet; and primary research in the form of a survey conducted with 101 adults, ages 18 through 60, on their opinions and beliefs surrounding social networks, I have identified some significant patterns that seek to explain how adults have come to see the impact of social networks in their lives and careers—both positively and negatively. I have also outlined suggested solutions to address integrating social networking into everyday life in a way that still respects the ethical and moral standards of each individual.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To all of my friends, family, and colleagues who have supported my efforts to complete this thesis, I send a very heartfelt thank you. This project elicited no shortage of opinions, conversations, emails, phone calls, tweets, and Facebook posts from people excited to share their thoughts on how social networking is becoming a bigger part of their lives every day, for better or worse. To everyone who sent me information on the latest trends in online activity, from the decline of MySpace to the ascension of Twitter, I truly appreciate that you took the time to make sure I was aware of the most current information in this rapidly changing environment.

I would also like to especially thank my advisor, Prof. Frederick Ruf, for his support, patience, and interest as I pursued this topic. His insights helped me to continually see how these technological trends fit into our broader development as moral human beings.
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CHAPTER ONE
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET: A MODERN HISTORY

When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the World Wide Web.... Now even my cat has its own page.

President William J. Clinton, announcing the Next Generation Internet Initiative, 1996

For an entire generation of people in the developed world, the Internet is a essential part of daily life. The digital generation, born in the 1980s and also known as Generation Y, came into a fully automated world of DVD players, online photo sharing, and iPods. A completely networked society is all they know, thanks to the almost mundane presence of computers and cell phones. Where Generation X grew into the digital age, Generation Y was born right in the middle of it.

Like automobiles, televisions, and other major inventions of the 20th century, modern life has fully adapted itself to the Internet, and many people of all ages find themselves unable to live without it. What was once the domain of government geeks with top-secret security clearances is now the domain of the office manager, the McDonald’s fry cook, and the construction worker. The exclusivity once associated with accessing the web is completely gone, and while access to it is not guaranteed to anyone, most people looking for it can find it. Today wireless Internet access is available on many commercial airlines, meaning even at 30,000 feet, the connection remains.

As use of the Internet has grown, different types of users have emerged and niche sites have appeared to accommodate their specific needs. The Web itself continues to
transform into a more customized and customizable tool than ever imagined, a far leap from its origins as a communications tool that could withstand intrusion from America’s enemies during the Cold War in the 1960s. That first system, called ARPANet (for the Advanced Research Projects Agency that created it) spread as the federal government opened the system for use at a small group of universities, and eventually transformed into the predecessor of the Internet we know and use today.

In the decades since, the web has become a second shadow to billions worldwide. The U.S. Census Department found that 62 percent of households reported using Internet access in the home in 2007, 82 percent of those on a high-speed connection. With greater speed comes greater functionality, and with it the evolution of the Internet is still very much underway. The latest iteration is branded “Web 2.0,” and the definition of the term is still evolving (and is quickly being overshadowed by talk of Web 3.0) but it generally encompasses themes important to the modern Internet including ease of use, high levels of user-generated content, and broad data and information sharing.

Today, the most popular application of these themes falls under the heading of social networking. 2008 will come to be remembered as the year social networks and the advent of social media took off among the masses. A major portion of the connected population worldwide was drawn to hugely popular sites specifically created to foster interaction among users, around a common theme. These sites are some of the biggest attractions on the Internet, and young and old alike are flocking to them. Social networks are generally defined as “a social structure made of individuals (or organizations) called "nodes," which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency,
such as friendship, kinship, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige.”

The Growth of Social Networks

How has this radical growth of social networks happened in such a short amount of time? One explanation is the convergence of online and offline communication, such as that explained here:

One way to understand social-networking sites like Facebook and MySpace is to consider that younger digital natives are not necessarily being exhibitionists when they post photographs of themselves and share personal details there. Instead, these users are living a life in which consciousness is spread out evenly over two platforms: real life and the web. Rather than feeling schizophrenic or somehow pathological, digital natives understand that these two realms divide the self much as speech and the written word divide language, a division that humans have lived with for a long time without going bonkers.

Indeed, it is younger users, or digital natives as they are sometimes known, that have fueled the growth of these new networks around the world. It has been just about five years since the first publicly accessible online social networks appeared. Friendster is widely seen as the first online social network—since its launch in 2002, it has registered more than 100 million users worldwide, and adds 100,000 users daily, according to data on its website. While its popularity in the U.S. has waned considerably, it is the biggest social networking site across Asia, where it has more than 75 million accounts registered.
MySpace.com billed itself as a competitor of Friendster from its introduction in 2003, and in short order millions of users flocked to the site, attracted by the chance to find new friends online, connect with existing friends in a new way, and take advantage of the almost infinite customization options allowed. Young adults looking for a place to express themselves need look no further than their MySpace pages, which have been described as “the messy online equivalent of a teen bedroom” with their colorful backgrounds, options to play music and video, display photos, and more. There are hundreds if not thousands of websites devoted to helping people create custom MySpace pages, and the tones range from wholesome to explicit, depending on the user. As the site grew, it became more and more synonymous with teenagers and the MTV set. In fact,
one would-be TV star, Tila Tequila, got her own reality show on MTV after amassing more than 1 million MySpace friends.

In a May 2007 interview on Canadian television show The Hour, MySpace cofounder Tom Anderson described how the site took off: “There used to be this network where you couldn’t see people unless you had a friend. Friendster was first, and we were trying to compete, so when people signed up, they wouldn’t see anything. That’s boring. So I put myself as this person that could connect everyone else so you could see people when you signed up. That’s the idea.”

From its inception, one of the world’s most popular websites was created on the premise of seeing someone else and connecting with them based on that first look, whether or not you actually know them. MySpace calls itself “an online community that lets you meet your friends' friends,” in part because every page lists all the contacts of its owner, making it possible to see everyone else connected to the same person. Today the site has lost a great deal of its popularity among the tech elite and older users, but remains a major social networking destination for teens, users accessing the Internet via cell phones and portable devices, and people of color.
While MySpace was always available to the public at large (with some age restrictions in place to ensure parental consent and to protect younger users), Facebook started on the insular campus of Harvard University in 2004. Within months most of its launch most of the school was using the service, and within a year it spread to other Ivy League universities, and then to colleges across the country. From there, the service expanded among high school students by invitation only, and then to anyone with a valid email address, becoming fully accessible for the first time to people with no current school affiliation in fall 2006.

Figure 2: A public MySpace page featuring the cast of the popular vampire movie ‘Twilight’
Facebook offered the first social networking platform that was widely palatable to adults. Where MySpace is a bottomless pit of customization options, Facebook offers

![Facebook Screenshot](image.png)

Figure 3: Screenshot of Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg's page
users a streamlined look that only allows minimal visual customization—every page is white with blue text and headers, and minimal backgrounds. The look and feel of every page is structurally the same; the only real opportunity for customization comes through the content users provide on their pages.

In 2008 Facebook became the world’s largest social network, and in September 2009 Facebook hit a major milestone when it announced that more than 300 million accounts had been created worldwide. More than 100 million of those accounts were created since April 2009, a massive jump in just about six months. One of the company’s mottos is: “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life.” Of course, how that is defined is entirely up to the end user.

Beyond Facebook, the latest iteration of social media began in 2006, when several sites launched that gave users limited amounts of space to share a message, also known as microblogging. Several sites offering microblogging in a variety of forms, via text messages or online, for example, launched around the same time, but at the 2007 South by Southwest Interactive conference, one of the biggest technology events in the United States, microblog Twitter.com caught on among the thousands of technologically savvy attendees looking to attach themselves to the latest new web tools available. Usage shot up according to Silicon Valley-based technology blog Valleywag.com: “One-line one-to-many messaging service Twitter is aflame during the South by Southwest Interactive conference. The techies, bloggers, and various citizenry-of-media are pumping the service with constant web, IM and SMS messages. Twitter staffers Jack and Alex tell me that the site, which normally carries around 20 thousand messages a day, broke 60
This prediction of Twitter’s future success was accurate. By 2009, while no where near the number of Facebook users, Twitter had more than 20 million accounts, a large number for a site that asks users to answer a simple question: “What are you doing?” and only gives 140 characters to answer it. Twitter has had a steep growth trajectory, in terms of numbers of accounts, and also in overall visibility before the public at large. In May 2009 Oprah invited Twitter co-founder Evan Williams on her show to demonstrate the service during a segment, and the same episode featured actor Ashton Kutcher, who was in a race with cable network CNN to be the first account with 1 million followers. Kutcher won thanks in part to his Oprah appearance.

Twitter has had other, more serious high-profile visibility opportunities, including its use as a source of information and breaking news among the millions who tweeted (sent Twitter messages) about the violence that occurred in Iran after the 2009 Presidential campaign and election there. But it is still seen by many as simply a tool for online narcissists, with millions more using the service to spout off their whereabouts, from the bathroom to the office to the beach. Many wonder if the service is too much information. The Twitter team answers by suggesting that their service actually helps to prevent information overload because users only have to pay attention to the tweets.
they want to read, and can ignore the rest:

The result of using Twitter to stay connected with friends, relatives, and coworkers is that you have a sense of what folks are up to but you are not expected to respond to any updates unless you want to. This means you can step in and out of the flow of information as it suits you and it never queues up with
increasing demand of your attention. Additionally, users are very much in control of whose updates they receive, when they receive them, and on what device. For example, we provide settings for scheduling Twitter to automatically turn off at dinnertime and users can switch off Twitter updates at any point.\textsuperscript{12}

**Social Networks Then and Now**

The idea behind social networks is not new. For as long as people have roamed the earth, social groupings have organically developed. J.A. Barnes, an anthropologist, used the phrase in 1954 to describe a group of people connected around family, work, or hobbies after studying connections among a Norwegian fishing village.\textsuperscript{13} Not surprisingly, today’s web based social networks exist largely around similar areas of common ground. Flickr.com, for example, fosters connections based on photographs taken around the globe, while JDate.com brings Jewish singles together online for dating and romance. Many social networks simply take what already happens offline and places the activity in a virtual realm, although in many instances physical distance is no longer a barrier to joining a network.

More recently, anthropologist Robin Dunbar conducted research that revealed the average number of social connections the average person could successfully maintain hovered around 150 for a variety of evolutionary and sociological reasons. This is now known as the “Dunbar Number” in sociology and technology discussions).\textsuperscript{14} Dunbar wrote,

Human societies contain buried within them a natural grouping of around 150 people. These groups do not have a specific function: in one society they may be used for one purpose, in another society for a different purpose. Rather, they are a consequence of the fact that the human brain cannot sustain more than a certain number of relationships of a given strength at any one time. The figure of 150 seems to represent the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a
genuinely social relationship, the kind of relationship that goes with knowing who they are and how they relate to us. Putting it another way, it's the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar.\textsuperscript{15}

The Dunbar Number concept goes a long way toward explaining why some people feel overwhelmed in our increasingly connected world. The Internet is a major reason why our personal networks have grown increasingly large—having the opportunity to rapidly correspond with people around the world is not something previous generations had the opportunity to do. This is an outgrowth of the global society that experts have predicted for decades.

In 2001, Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz described our global society in his book, \textit{Globalization and its Discontents}, as “Fundamentally, it is the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods and services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders.”\textsuperscript{16}

The Internet and social networks now offer a way to remove those last few barriers for people moving across borders. While physical travel is still not instantaneous, email, message boards, and other more traditional online forms of communication combine with social networks to allow for the entire person to exist online, through photos, videos, and written words, all in the framework of a specific website. With these online personas, people can make friends around the world.
For the most part, many people find this virtual aspect of social networks interesting and exciting. But with this new way of connecting comes a new set of issues that never or rarely occur in the physical world. This concept is essential to understanding some of the challenges that can arise with modern social constructs. The size of a social network can create enough stress for some people to resist joining altogether, and with increased size, greater political considerations are required. As online social networks grow and more people have access to each other’s information, the pressure to figure out what is relevant, interesting, or sharable enough to disclose with a large group grows.

There are a few instances of numerical limitations put on people interested in connecting with others online, but for the most part the only restriction is one’s desire to be in contact with someone else. This unfettered ability to create unlimited connections has its downside, most notably that it takes a great deal of time to manage. Microsoft founder Bill Gates stopped using Facebook, for example, after receiving friend requests from more than 10,000 people, noting it was too time consuming to figure out whether or not he actually knew the person sending the request. While the average user probably does not have that many friend requests, there is still a great deal of time needed to manage even a much smaller network.

In 2004, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released the results of a major survey seeking feedback on predictions from a cross-section of web experts and industry leaders about the future of the Internet. One of the sections of the report covered the use and growth of social networks. Asked to look from then to ten years in the future, the prediction posed to these experts was:
By 2014 use of the Internet will increase the size of people’s social networks far beyond what has traditionally been the case. This will enhance trust in society, as people have a wider range of sources from which to discover and verify information about job opportunities, personal services, common interests, and products.

Of respondents, 39 percent agreed, but 27 percent challenged the premise of the prediction. The sentiment behind it is at the heart of many debates over social media today. More than a quarter of respondents challenging it suggests that they disagree with its premise, and the most likely culprit is the idea that the Internet and these larger social networks can “enhance trust in society.”

It has not taken ten years to see these answers come to light. In less than five years, the love affair with online social networks has also spawned a backlash against them. A great deal of people shy away from social networks precisely because they feel that the opposite is the case, that these networks foster a one sided, potentially dishonest view of the world and people in it. Social networks can be seen as a bastion of narcissism, where people assume their every act is worthy of declaration just because there is a platform for display. Fear is another driving factor. With so much information in the open, many have chosen not to join social networks for fear of personal data falling into the wrong hands, or over worries of how to navigate delicate situations in public spaces. As web entrepreneurs earn millions selling advertising based on demographics of site users, some people also object to being part of those transactions. And there is also the view that these sites are child’s play, created and designed for Generation X and Y users, with no real benefit or use for older populations.
That view may exist partly because the first major social network to take off in the United States, MySpace, has always been focused on and catered to younger users. Still, older users are joining social networks in huge numbers. If young people fueled their initial growth, older people are maintaining it. And yet, despite this influx of intergenerational networks, there is still a great deal of confusion over how social media really works and what it is really for. Where younger users have an innate sense of how to integrate technology into their lives, older users are often much less experienced, and in trying to become comfortable with that integration and are finding themselves facing everything from identity theft to job loss because they are unable to manage the very information they choose. As a result, these older adults are at risk for a greater degree of negative consequences over their participation in social networks, and may have fewer opportunities to recover from damage to their reputation than younger people.

The networks that exist today do not always provide a clear structure for users to learn from and understand. Experience comes in large part through trial and error. Some networks encourage communication around specific topics, such as LinkedIn, which focuses on career and business. But on other sites, like LiveJournal.com, an online diary and storytelling portal, the only limits to information sharing are imagination and comfort level. Along with the excitement many feel as they connect with offline friends, family, and colleagues in an online setting, others also feel a significant amount of trepidation over how their information is shared.

For celebrities, corporate brand names, and other well-known entities, social networks present an unparalleled communication opportunity. Notables like cyclist Lance
Armstrong communicate directly about their activities to legions of fans, which then spread the thoughts, comments and actions of their favorite figures among their own networks. Nonprofit organizations and consumer product companies can reach out directly to those who use their products and services, and get real time feedback on successes and failures. These examples offer one explanation as to what has made social media so successful today. It has given not only people, but also brands, the opportunity to greatly expand their circle of contacts, and therefore influence, with a set of easy-to-use tools.

But there is a big difference between being famous offline and using online tools to promote your work, and being a “regular person” offline and using online tools to promote yourself. The concept of Twitter celebrities is a perfect example—people like marketing consultant Chris Brogan have amassed huge numbers of followers clinging to their every tweet for their latest gem of wisdom. More than 100,000 people are listening into Brogan’s feed, making him one of the many people who’ve turned offline expertise into online celebrity. In his case, there is a natural fit for his sort of advice in an online setting. However, there is a significant difference between a company using social networks to market their products or a movie star hawking their next film, and a person using them to build and maintain interpersonal connections.

Social Media and the Generational Divide

Younger generations have always been more receptive to new technologies than older ones. How people tend to adopt new technologies was outlined in Diffusion of Innovation, a textbook by Brett Rogers written in the 1960s. Rogers noted that the first
people willing to test most new innovations tend to be younger, wealthier, and exhibit more leadership tendencies (see graph below).

![Rogers Diffusion of Innovation model](image)

Table 1: Rogers Diffusion of Innovation model

While this concept and model was developed before the Internet existed, and was based in part on how farmers adapted to new processes for growing corn, it is still a dominant theory in use to describe how new technologies are adopted, and is quite relevant for understanding the growth of social networks. Social media usage began to infiltrate populations across generations the way many other digital trends have over the years; many older demographics initially decried social media as a more of a toy for teens, while others embraced it as a tool for social and political empowerment, career advancement, fun, and networking.

Regardless of the service, there are some significant differences in social media use among the generations. Younger users have widely been believed to be most comfortable sharing intimate information with their online friends, much to the chagrin and embarrassment of their parents and other adults. Research shows that younger people
tend to use this sharing as a tool to develop their own identity, one that is distinct from their parents and others around them: “For teenagers, the online realm may be adopted enthusiastically because it represents ‘their’ space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance, an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence—to construct, experiment with, and present a reflexive project of the self in a social context as well as (for some) flouting communicative norms and other risk-taking behaviors … suggesting that what for an adult observer may seem risky, is for a teenager precisely the opportunity they seek.”

Despite perceptions that they are the most socially promiscuous group, shamelessly exposing themselves to the world online, there is a great deal of interest among younger users in determining just who sees shared information. A series of interviews with British teenagers ages 13 through 16 about their social media use conducted by British researcher Sonia Livingstone found that privacy was a common theme and concern: even teens with 500 friends online were concerned about how the various categories of their contacts were notified of their activities. Livingstone also found that top priorities among this group of teens was making changes to how privacy settings operate on social networks, and opportunities to use private rather than public messaging.

Still, social networks are the places teens overwhelmingly turn to for interaction with others. In 2009 two Australian girls, ages 10 and 12, used their cell phones to update their Facebook statuses saying they were trapped in a drain, rather than calling the local version of 9-1-1. The girls were assailed around the world as the definition of why
young people’s dependence on social networks is a problem. While their decision may not have been the best one, the fact is their call for help worked. A friend, probably close in age, saw their post and alerted the authorities, which were able to rescue the girls without incident.

This may be an extreme situation, but it accurately represents the generational differences between social networks. In an emergency, adults call 9-1-1, teens reach out to their friends. It has probably always been this way to some degree, but in this case it was the method of outreach the teens used that raised such a stir. It probably made the best sense to them to reach out via Facebook, because it’s only natural for young people to feel confident that at least a few of their friends would be on at almost any time of the day or night, and able to offer some assistance. But it also makes sense that adults, who may not always have that same degree of comfort communicating in such a way, to wonder what the girls were thinking. For younger people, the consequences of this behavior tend to be less severe, particularly since many of their peers are doing the same thing. British researcher Sonia Livingstone describes this kind of activity as “identity as display,” which elucidates why sites like the fully customizable MySpace became so popular so quickly among teens.

For people who already have established identities, and who may be unsure of how to even develop a secure password for websites, the prospect of sharing personal life details is unfathomable. Unlike Generations X and Y, the Baby Boomer generation did not grow up with such a networked society. Many Boomers in the workplace find themselves learning the latest in computer technology from someone half their age.
Generation Y makes up the fastest growing segment of the workforce, so it is clearly natural that social networks that mean so much in their personal lives would become a major part of their professional ones as well.

To keep pace, many older adults are keeping up and diving in with both feet—over the past year, several surveys have found that the greatest growth segment among social media users is women ages 35-55. A study published in June 2009 reported that while 99 percent of U.S. teens aged 18-24 years old have accounts on major social networks, only 22 percent used Twitter. So while the perception exists that the only people using online tools are younger, the reality is that social media has infiltrated every age group. As all of these sites have grown, statistics about each have defied conventional thinking. Despite millions of people with accounts the great majority of Twitter activity comes from just a small percentage of users, and despite misconceptions that microblogging is a tool embraced by the young, survey after survey shows that older users are more prevalent on the site than younger ones.
At the same time, there is a bigger sense that society as a whole finds the principles of confidentiality, privacy and secrecy largely diminished in their power. There are so many large-scale security breaches and identity thefts on a regular basis that many people either have lost information in this way or may know someone who has. These are situations that are completely out of the control of the individual—simply by using a credit card in a major retailer, a host of personal information can be stolen by unscrupulous thieves. And companies who are responsible for protecting that information often downplay the incidents and the risks to the individual that can result, desensitizing consumers to the dangers, which can then roll over to other facets of personal data. When we are reliant on others to protect us and through a mistake that protection is breached but no harm results, the risks can become even fewer in our own minds.
However concerned they are about credit card information, many adults are hypersensitive about what information on them is shared online. Teens have less at stake when sharing information online than older adults do, whose careers, reputations and relationships that have been crafted and maintained for a number of years. The immediacy of online disclosures is such that in just a few seconds, personal thoughts and information can get into hands of people with the power to significantly impact personal or professional lives. Of course, the level of risk is not the same for everyone, but the unfortunately reality is that while this does not have to be the case, many people find themselves caught up in the excitement of social networking without considering the risks or taking steps to learn how to protect themselves.

**Common Sense and the Internet**

There is a simple adage that many people use to guide their behavior, whether on or offline, that is some variation of: if you wouldn’t say it to your mother, your minister or your professor, don’t say it to anyone else. And above all, never put it in writing. For many, this is a common sense approach to communication and relationship management that works in a majority of traditional communications circumstances. But these so-called rules of common sense do not always fit nicely in a socially networked world. For many people, social networks consist not only of close friends and family, but also coworkers, managers, acquaintances made at conferences, and long-lost childhood friends (and enemies, in some cases).

As a result, it is nearly impossible to suggest that people only share information online anything unless it meets these criteria. As a result, social media requires the user’s
concept of common sense to shift to some degree. While that does not mean it is necessary or even advisable to start blurting (or typing) out the first thing that comes to mind on any given issue, it’s wise to be aware of the differing kinds of relationships in place, and the communication distinctions between them. Reminiscing online about a night of drunken revelry from college might be a great story to share with the friends who were there, but sharing that story the whole of someone’s social network may be more embarrassing than charming.

It is important to remember that there is no rule preventing people from reserving information from others that do not need to have access to it. However, there is a great deal of peer pressure to be highly visible and connected, and people have trouble balancing the two. Many find themselves in difficult situations over information communicated online simply because they did not know how to limit who sees what they share. Even when adults do not want to broadcast information to everyone, they can still end up doing so by mistake. Where young people may be intentionally sharing information with their networks, adults are doing so accidentally. Unfortunately, the intention behind the action has no bearing on the consequences, but adults conceivably have more to lose when their reputation is damaged.

Adults apply a one kind of common sense to their online experience, based on generational differences, life experience, and societal pressures; younger users apply another kind. Historically, it is this sort of generational friction that can ultimately create social change—each generation has found itself at the point where it has pushed the boundaries created by those before them. It is these “boundary pushers” that led to
women’s right to vote, where the overriding common sense previously said no such right was warranted. A key difference with the current common sense that governs much of what is available online is that, for Generations X and Y, participation is as much about establishing individuality as it is aimed at achieving a specific goal for any group. One way these users choose to establish their identity is to spread details of it as widely as possible, and social networks provide the perfect platform to do so.

The desire to express individuality means people have to share more to differentiate themselves, in a world where everyone is sharing intimate details about himself or herself. The theory of the looking glass self, espoused by Charles Horton Cooley in the early 20th century, says that people are aware of themselves as individuals, or as “I”, in relation to how they are viewed by others. As a person gives off clues about themselves through verbal and nonverbal cues, physical appearance, and other behaviors, outsiders are able to make judgments and give feedback to the individual that then colors their own self-image. Cooley theorized that this process began at a young age and continued throughout ones life, only ceasing when social interactions end.

As more and more people have access to information about others, they have numerous chances to create “looking-glass” style judgments about others. Online social networks take this construct a step further because they give people the opportunity to form opinions without the person actually ever being present. Observers may come to feel that their pronouncements about someone are even more legitimate because they come from the words and images posted by the person themselves.
Sissela Bok has another look at why people feel the need to disclose personal information in the first place, in her book *Secrets*: “Someone who reveals personal and confidential matters may seek to influence listeners in ways that are not necessarily manipulative. The person who unveils a secret gains a measure of control over how others see it. The partially shared secret mystifies and tantalizes; as the revelation continues, the speaker establishes his identity in the eyes of the listeners, coming to matter to them in a new way. He no longer feels blurred and anonymous in their eyes; his life has taken on meaning for them. He is set apart, unique through what he has revealed.”

Teenagers in particular have always felt and acted on this pull to share. As individuals learn about how they can interact in a way that creates interesting relationships with others, it is natural to talk about oneself to bring more attention to certain aspects of life that others might be excited to know. A secret whispered in an ear or a passed in a note from one person to another, or shared among sorority sisters or fraternity brothers, creates a tight bond around a shared experience. Sharing intimacies brings people together through that common knowledge.

Information that many people would never share in public can form the basis for an entire online conversation—financial information, sexual exploits, health issues, and drug use are some of the areas where people seem to have no problem sharing personal details online. In a lot of cases this has worked without issue, because many sites over the years have afforded a cloak of invisibility that allow people to share their secrets anonymously through avatars, usernames, and password. Unlike those cases, most social
networks are supposed to be built on one’s true identity. User generated review website Yelp.com encourages people to use a real photo of themselves when posting reviews of businesses, to help foster greater transparency around who contributes to the site. But even in those instances where identity is known, discretion does not seem to be the issue it once was.

What passes generally as common sense in an online setting is highly debatable. Defined as “sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts,” what might start out as a ridiculous or impossible concept often ends up evolving into what we come to know as common sense. History is full of societal changes that were initially beyond the realm of possibility, that are now commonplace in daily life in America—interracial and same-sex marriages, female CEOs, or an African-American President of the United States—most of these have come at the hands of a younger generation pushing for change against the status quo of the old guard.

Most relationships have an inherent degree of respect that automatically colors how parties treat each other. Most often, the treatment doesn’t have to be taught, except perhaps to young children—once you reach a certain age behaviors are generally understood for both parties involved. Bosses and employees; teachers and students; parents and children; all these traditional relational structures are bound by the common sense that dictates such connections. However, within these and other relationships, there are often outliers that challenge tradition. School children, for example, are expected to listen to teachers and other school administrators. But in the case of segregated schools in 1960s Alabama, students were forced to defy those authority figures that told them they
did not deserve and education, to force them into giving it to them. Decades later, common sense evolved to the degree that those in charge of schools understand that they have an obligation to educate all children, where previously just the opposite was true. While segregation and social media are clearly at different points of the moral spectrum, this sort of idea reveals the mind shift that people have to make to understand how young people can seem so willing to share information online. Traditionally, people have been much more easily able to conceal their personal thoughts. Disclosure was limited to the people (or things) one could trust to keep a secret—close friends, family members, or private diaries. Of course, people also had (and have) the option of keeping information they don't want anyone to know to themselves. But today the cultural zeitgeist has clearly shifted away from a focus on secrets, to an emphasis on disclosure.

Privacy versus secrecy is an important distinction for social networkers to address, but there are few tools to help navigate the decision-making process regarding which should govern social media. There are obviously personal choices involved. People who keep secrets are often described as sneaky, shifty, or untrustworthy. Unfortunately those who might choose to remain silent could find themselves described in the negative terms above. “Negative views of secrecy are even more common,” Bok writes in Secrets. “Why would you conceal something, many ask, if you are not afraid to have it known?” And especially in social groupings where everyone is joining online social networks, those who do not participate can be harshly judged and stereotyped, all for what they are not saying.
Part of the discomfort with this evolving medium is the tension between online and offline definitions of common terms like friend, particularly as different generations access social sites. Historically friends have fallen into a few well-understood categories: best friends, old friends, close friends. The definitions are not the same for everyone of course, but people are familiar enough with the terms to generally understand what they mean. But with social networks, there is a new definition of friend, inspired by the terms social networks use to describe contacts, that can also mean someone you may have met once at a conference, or perhaps never even met in person, but connected with on the web.

Today younger users naturally seem to understand that an online friend does not necessarily fall under the same category as an offline one, and no adapting is needed to accept this concept into their lives. For others, this is clearly a mind shift, but again, cultural institutions are coming along in recognizing how these new concepts are affecting not just younger users, but society at large. In 2009 Oxford University Press selected “unfriend,” which means, “to remove someone as a ‘friend’ on a social networking site such as Facebook,” as its word of the year. Last year Merriam-Webster’s word of the year was “overshare,” which referenced the tendency of people to spill more information on social networks than they would in other settings. Studies have cited “relaxed attitudes toward (or lack of interest in) personal privacy,” as an explanation for the growth in social networks. But there have always been concerns about online privacy, and changing attitudes does not mean these concerns have disappeared.
Instead, users are developing new strategies to handle them, like relaxing their definition of friend.

“Cultures differ in their attitudes toward any one form of secrecy,” Bok continued in *Secrets*. “Thus sexual relations among the unmarried are freely acknowledged in one, while branded as the most shameful of secrets in another.” This is absolutely the case today, but the cultures in question span age groups instead of geography. Younger people often discuss their “hookups”—casual sexual encounters—online or in person, while adults cover their eyes and shake their heads at the lack of decorum they see. Oversharing, indeed.
CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL SECRECY, PRIVACY AND THE WORKPLACE

If you reveal your secrets to the wind you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees.

*Kahlil Gibran, Sand and foam: a book of aphorisms*

Privacy in social networking is a constantly debated topic. On one hand, it appears antithetical to the foundation of social networks to even mention it. After all, most of these systems have the notion of shared personal information and connections firmly entrenched in their foundations. Americans do not live under a Constitutionally mandated right to privacy, but we have high expectations that ours will not be violated, and that feeling is continually reinforced by society. Privacy in many areas has been a major source of litigation and legislation, and some protections have emerged through Constitutional amendments and legal precedents. Freedom of religion protects the privacy of personal beliefs; protection from undo search and seizure maintains privacy in homes and private places. How these rights might extend to the Internet have not been established, but the medium’s public nature could make it extremely difficult for anyone to argue that the information it contains—if it was willingly posted online—should be seen as confidential in any way.

Despite the high expectations of privacy, comfort with sharing information online is a given for a large part of the population. The public has become extremely comfortable with online shopping and banking, for example, where sensitive personal
and financial information is traded to do everything from shopping on eBay to applying for a mortgage with LendingTree.com, an online financier. In turn, what most of these sites have in common are clearly articulated policies regarding the use and protection of the personal data that users input in exchange for the service. Most subscribe to well-established security standards for information protection, similar to online equivalents of the Better Business Bureau or Good Housekeeping seal for online privacy. The most well known and respected is TRUSTe, which offers a seal of approval for companies and sites who meet a list of security requirements on the web, and maintain them annually. In 2009 Facebook became the first social network to appear on TRUSTe's list of the top ten of companies with the most trusted privacy policies—a major win for the site considering its history of numerous privacy-related complaints from users.¹

Despite the positive attention that this sort of accolade brings, the benefit is greater to the company itself than to users. Privacy is clearly a marketing concern for web developers in addition to visitors—websites visibly feature their privacy policies as a way to reassure visitors that their information will be protected while there, which in turn makes people comfortable making purchases or pursuing other money making activities. Like most reputable websites, the major social networks have established privacy policies that outline how the information users post is used, and they may describe specific actions that users should take to help ensure their own privacy while online in addition to the site's built-in protections.

However, research finds that reviewing the specific components of a privacy policy is rare for most web users. A recent survey conducted in the United Kingdom
found that 71 percent of people ignore privacy policies for any website. So even if a site has an award-winning privacy policy, many users will never know. Research consistently finds this to be the case. “Across different sites, anecdotal evidence suggests that participants are happy to disclose as much information as possible to as many people as possible. It is not unusual to find profiles ... that list their owners’ personal email addresses (or link to their personal websites), in violation of the recommendation or requirements of the hosting service itself.” Even when users are advised or instructed not to reveal personal information, most times they have never read those instructions in the first place. This kind of activity is an indicator of the rising comfort levels that exist across age groups where the web is concerned—because so much of life is conducted through it, once trust has been successfully established and experienced a few times, even with entirely unrelated sites or systems, it becomes a given. While it makes a great deal of sense to review the policies of any site where users may willingly upload a variety of professional, educational, and personal data, relaxed attitudes toward privacy combined with increasing trust in online activities have made the practice all but obsolete. It is almost as though people are under the impression that the protections that exist at one site will transfer to the entire Internet, and that is definitely not the case.

Personal information in the wrong hands can create a great deal of trouble, and inconsistencies in information protections among networks, combined with a lack of awareness on how to use social networks, is keeping some people away. The risks for exposing personal information online are very real. An article published by researchers from Carnegie Mellon University in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of*
*Sciences* found that identity thieves could use user-contributed data gathered from Facebook, including names, birthdates, and birthplaces, to determine social security numbers and apply for credit cards with the information.\(^4\)

Even if there is right to privacy covering the Internet waiting to be discovered, that does not mean that the information therein is private, and segments of the population remain wary of the possible negative consequences. Despite the above referenced online protections like TRUSTe and others there are clearly a large segment of users who desire an even greater level of control over their privacy where social networks are concerned. Even those people who use social networks seem to feel that their information is still too public. Daniel Solove noted in his book, *The Future of Reputation*, that some social networkers have an enhanced awareness of online privacy: “On the contrary, Facebook users generally seem quite savvy about their online privacy options. Although Facebook users might think it is too quaint to expect all of their secrets to remain in the bag, this doesn’t mean that they don’t care about privacy. They just see privacy differently. What many of the Facebook users objected to was the increased accessibility of their personal data . . . Privacy can be violated not just by revealing previously concealed secrets, but by increasing the accessibility to information already available.”\(^5\)

This could explain why Facebook has caused periodic firestorms among users when it has changed site features and aspects of its privacy protections. In 2006, for example, Facebook launched its News Feed, where every action a user performed was broadcast to all of their friends automatically, unless the user took steps to prevent it. Prior to News Feed, users were only able to see interactions that involved them on their
pages, and had to go to friend’s pages to see similar information about others. News Feed changed that entirely. Research shows that users tend not to change default settings for sites and software, and since many people were not aware of the impending change they were shocked to see their information being broadcast without their knowledge or explicit consent. Online rioting ensued as people cried foul over this new method of distributing “their” content.

Facebook cofounder Mark Zuckerberg responded with an apology, offering to share more details about such changes before they occurred in the future. Today the feature remains, and users are just as comfortable with it as they were before the change. In the end, the complaints seemed to be more about the perception that they were losing control over their data, rather than the reality that this information had all been willingly provided, and could easily be kept private with a few clicks of a mouse. The uproar really stemmed from feelings about changes from a comfortable setting to a new and potentially uncontrollable frightening one.

Facebook's changes represented an invasion of personal space, even though the space is virtual rather than physical, and the details were willingly shared. That invisible bubble that exists as a barrier against physical intrusion from others clearly has an online equivalent, but it is not well defined, and social networking is constantly creating reasons for people to use trial and error to find the best ways to address it. That feeling of being invaded makes great sense in a setting where information shared can be a very personal extension of the individual. Of the social networks, Facebook probably has the most potential for mistakes—unlike Twitter, which only gives 140 characters for users to send
Facebook allows photos, videos, notes, web links, status updates and several other ways for people to embarrass themselves or others.

Not surprisingly, Facebook’s team sees its multifaceted network as an easier, not harder way to communicate with others. In-house sociologist Cameron Marlow wrote on his blog:

Facebook and other social media allow for a type of communication that is somewhat less taxing than direct communication. Technologies like News Feed and RSS readers allow people to consume content from their friends and stay in touch with the content that is being shared. This consumption is still a form of relationship management as it feeds back into other forms of communication in the future. For instance, a high school friend uploads a photo of her new puppy and this photo appears in your News Feed. You click on the photo, browse through a host of other photos and discover that she has also gotten engaged, which may lead you to reach out to her.7

Like Twitter, Facebook advertises the ease of communication. And while this form of communication may indeed be less taxing than face-to-face, telephonic, email, or other kinds, it is also not nearly as well established, meaning most people have not had the level of experience with talking to friends on Twitter that they have talking to them on the phone. It is not that easy to use yet. And with new forms of communication there are always some sort of kinks that must be worked out. As anyone who has ever sent an email with one intention in mind and received a completely unexpected response knows, context is extremely hard to establish, and often missing from these kinds of electronic conversations. It may feel less stressful to digital natives who live their lives communicating on different planes, but for the older or less experienced, more time and practice is needed for it to feel natural.
While adults are finding more and more reasons to participate in social networking, whether it be to keep up with old friend's marriage plans or track how their company is being talked about online, a sense of risk permeates the experience many have. The beauty Marlow sees in Facebook’s system is exactly what creates the tension for Facebook users in particular, because the wildfire aspect of information dissemination exacerbates the feeling of not being in control. The concerns seem less about data theft and more about oversharing. Older users who are staying away from social networks do not want to know what everyone else is doing, nor do they seem to want people to know all of their business either.

The stark contrast between reciprocal and passive networks shows the effect of technologies such as News Feed. If a phone call were needed to get the news people now can find online, our networks would be both much more reciprocal and smaller—closer to the Dunbar Number. But as the chart below shows, in an environment where everyone is passively engaged with each other, news like a new baby or an engagement can propagate very quickly through this highly connected network, even through more personalized responses may still only come from a small group. Reciprocal communication stays low, even when maintained relationships (people who are connected even if they talk via Facebook rarely or never) climb.
Table 3: Graphical depiction of average network structures for Facebook users\textsuperscript{9}

Both have their advantages and disadvantages, and when optimally set-up either system can be suited to match individual communication styles. But most users are not familiar with these passive and reciprocal network structures. For them, there is just Facebook. Taking the time to figure out how to best set up its features to serve their individual communications needs is well beyond the expected level of engagement most people envision when they sign up. There are significant technical and social aspects to maintaining online privacy. Those without the technical savvy, or who are simply not paying close attention, can easily find their information and by proxy themselves, exposed. As the Carnegie Mellon researchers noted in their research on the early stages of Facebook, “its interface grants participants very granular control on the searchability and visibility of their personal information.”\textsuperscript{10} However, accessing that granular functionality is not generally intuitive, and can require a significant amount of time,
concentration, and direct engagement to achieve. While by no means impossible, the average user may decide the risk of harm is low enough to ignore these tools, even while worrying that some issues or embarrassment may occur.

Beyond the technological aspects, there are a number of delicate social situations that can arise when choosing to connect—or not—with certain people online. Managing those connections properly also plays a key role in how information is protected. In today’s increasingly interconnected world, some have found themselves at best embarrassed by information on social networks, and at worst ruined. Divorces, firings, and other major life events are happening today, all because of things shared or found online.

Some will argue that by posting anything online at anytime, the poster has implicitly made it available for any other interested party to access it. But many people still approach posting information online with the belief that its limits extend as far as the people they are connected with. In many cases people probably bank on the notion that no one even cares about the details they are sharing, beyond those friends, when in fact the information can be the domain of the entire network, or even of the entire web. At the same time, online disclosures can give people the opportunity to present information about themselves to their contacts in a controlled, well packaged fashion, as described by researcher Sonia Livingstone: “This suggests a definition of privacy not tied to the disclosure of certain types of information, rather a definition centered on having control over who knows what about you. Stein and Sinha put this formally when they define
privacy as 'the rights of individuals to enjoy autonomy, to be left alone, and to determine whether and how information about one's self is revealed to others.'\textsuperscript{11}

Ideally, users would not have to feel they are compromising a key component of their identity, namely their privacy, to be a part of a cultural and social experience. On their face, most social networks are open to anyone with the means to access them, which in an ideal world crosses political, socioeconomic, and class lines. They should be a place where everyone comes together around a common idea. Social networks seem like the perfect place to exercise Bok's idea of individual control over personal information, which mirrors Livingstone’s: "Such individual control should extend, moreover, to what people choose to share with one another about themselves—in families, for example, or with friends and colleagues. Without the intimacy that such sharing makes possible, human relationships would be impossible, and identity and plans would themselves suffer."\textsuperscript{12}

**Social Media and the World of Work**

For adults, an easy response to all these potential pitfalls is to simply not participate in social networks, but this attitude isn’t always practical, especially with the pressure to participate in order to be seen as a thriving participant in the work force. But with all the potential for an inappropriate disclosure that could haunt users online for years to come, a key question for many is why risk it? Many people stay away from social networks precisely because they fear what is taking place therein; people sharing their innermost secrets, posting provocative photos, and generally behaving in ways they deem inappropriate. As Bok wrote in *Secrets*, silence is the first defense of
secrets," and many are choosing to remain silent, at least where social networks are concerned.\textsuperscript{13}

That we live in a society for where work dominates our lives is without question, and remaining silent is often just not an option. Thanks to technology we can always be connected to our offices and our bosses wherever we go via Blackberries, iPhones, and laptops. Research by the Pew Internet and American Life project found that the majority of employed adults—62 percent—use the Internet or email at their job, and many have cell phones and Blackberries that keep them connected even when they are not physically at work.\textsuperscript{14}

Our transformation from an industrial to a technological society has happened globally in a relatively short timeframe, and has taken place even faster in the developed world. In the United States, this technological revolution has taken a particular stronghold in business and corporate life. Companies race to maximize productivity of employees and generate new revenue streams through technology. Highly trained and motivated professionals are also finding themselves constantly demanded to learn, keep up with and fully embrace new tools—social networks are just the latest iteration.

This transition to a technological society also occurs at the same time as multiple generations are converging in the workplace. Baby boomers are on the outer limit of these changes—they are retiring in large numbers every day. At the same time, our current economic crisis has lead many older workers to stay in the workforce longer than planned. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers 55 and older still make up almost 40 percent of the workforce.\textsuperscript{15} Generation X is squarely in the center, adopting
new technology as it comes along and applying it to daily life at work or play. For Generation Y and now Generation Z, technology isn’t just a part of their daily life, it is integral to it. With all of these age groups converging and competing for ever shrinking opportunities, everyone is looking for an edge, and social networks are one way some are achieving it.

Other research into social networks clearly shows that technological concerns over their use are not keeping older users away. Instead, there are greater concerns about privacy disclosures, related to generational differences in the way privacy is viewed. From a usability standpoint, the fact that these sites are free to use eliminates any financial barrier from taking advantage—with just a small measure of comfort with the web, users can easily join social networks. Advanced education or skills are not needed to enjoy them, and technologically, computers and other devices have advanced to the point where someone with basic keyboard skills can connect with family, friends and colleagues, which can present a simple way to stay in touch.

Professionally, social networking also offers a clearer way to implement some of the corporate buzzwords that permeate offices today. Words like, synergy, collaboration, and integration can be given weight through the virtual world of social networks—what better synergy is there than connecting with your fellow employees in far-flung offices of the same company? Employees are already primed to think in these terms about the work they do every day, and participating in social networks can tie an action to an otherwise intangible idea.
There is a large subset of other social networkers who feel they have no choice but to get involved; who are joining the flow to escape being left behind. In the workplace, this can be particularly true as social networkers trade information, tips and news between each other through Facebook status updates and Twitter messages. A professional who is not in that loop can quickly find himself or herself feeling left out, a bad place to be in an information economy. Others feel that social media keeps them sharp and in touch with the latest industry information and news in general.

A presence on Facebook has rapidly become a de-facto requirement for the modern employee. To be truly connected, many people feel one need to not only have a Facebook account, but be there regularly sharing photos, providing status updates, and connecting with friends, colleagues and acquaintances, within networks based on location, school, business or other organization.

Social networking also affords the ability to create a personal brand, one of the most popular business concepts to appear in the last fifteen years. One of the busiest segments of social networkers are those building their own individual name recognition. In 1997, business magazine Fast Company published a groundbreaking article by Tom Peters titled “The Brand Called You,” subtitled, “What it Takes to Be CEO of Me Inc.”16 Peters, a well-known business and efficiency expert, quickly became known as The Father of the Brand. Since then an entire culture has grown up around helping individuals create a brand around their name, even when they work for other known entities, with the idea that making a name for one’s self can help set people apart from their peers and
competition when the time comes to apply for a job, ask for a raise, start a business, or make other career moves. Self-help and business bookstore shelves (and their virtual counterparts) are filled with books like, “Be Your Own Brand: A Breakthrough Formula for Standing Out from the Crowd,” “Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success,” “The Brand YU Life: Re-thinking who you are through personal brand management,” and “Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand,” which says, “Personal branding is not about being famous, it’s about being selectively famous.”

As the economy declines and layoffs and reductions in force increase dramatically, people may see their colleagues benefiting from this kind of self promotion with accolades, new job opportunities, raises, and promotions, and feel inclined to take similar steps to develop a personal brand, even when they may have no experience or idea of how to execute it successfully. The media has joined the chorus, often equating personal branding with training and experience as ways to maintain a current job or find a new one, lending even more credence to the practice.

This entire process requires a certain level of narcissism and the ability to shamelessly promote, and there has been some backlash against it in the technology and business community. However, despite the negative feelings it conjures, people are still engaged in the act. At the same time people are worried about maintaining their professionalism to keep a position or secure a new one, they may be inadvertently damaging their chances by sharing information online that a current or future manager does not like or agree with. Users must be responsible for the information they self-select to disclose and share with others, but without a clear understanding of how that
information will be both perceived and used by other parties, the risks are unclear. It is one thing for a manager's perception of an employee to change to some degree after an embarrassing online disclosure; it is something entirely different for a manager to decide not to hire, or even to fire an employee for similar reasons.

And yet this is happening on a regular basis. In one case, a graduate student was widely berated on Twitter after unwisely degrading technology giant Cisco over a job offer, when she weighed positive of the large salary with the negative of “hating the work.” A Cisco employee found her message and responded that he would make sure the company was aware of her displeasure, and the exchange became a textbook case of how people should not go about sharing their feelings online. The student, Conner Riley, attempted to change her Twitter privacy settings to allow only her friends to see her updates after the fact, which unfortunately did nothing to eliminate the message that had already been sent. Even though this Cisco manager was not directly connected with Riley on Twitter, he found her message simply by searching for the company’s name, something many firms to do track conversations about their brand in the marketplace and help identity customer service issues before they turn into public relations problems. Again, while Riley’s online complaint was not the smartest way to express her dissatisfaction, had she taken greater advantage of Twitter’s privacy features earlier on and keep her status update’s private, this situation would never have seen the light of day.

Employment relationships are rife with issues between staff and management
related to online networking. Employees may friend or follow their colleagues or managers online, only to find that the information they considered relevant in after-hours situations has a bearing in their work settings as well. In a short time, the examples have mounted. In the fall of 2008, the Obama administration, who so successfully leveraged social networks during the presidential campaign, suffered a major embarrassment shortly after the election when lead speechwriter Jon Favreau was tagged in a photo (see below), posted by a friend on Facebook, showing him fondling a Hillary Clinton cutout. He was not fired, but did apologize to Clinton, and became one of the most visible symbols of social media mistakes. Had Favreau changed his privacy settings to ensure that only his selected connections could see photos he was tagged in, this story probably would still have come to light because of the players involved, but not as quickly as it did.
Others in lower-profile positions have found themselves without a job as a result of their perceived offenses. A former New England Patriots cheerleader was fired after pictures of her appearing to drawing phallic symbols and racist statements on a passed out friend appeared on Facebook. In other instances, a school staff member was fired after describing his free time activities with friends on Facebook using a racial slur, and a teacher was suspended for status updates including describing her school location.
as "the ghetto" and writing that she hated her students.\textsuperscript{20}

In these cases, the people in question were directly discussing or disparaging their work places in ways they would probably never have done in the presence of a superior. At the same time, it is unimaginable that they ever considered they would be fired for such statements. They probably didn't know that people outside their circle of friends could even see what they wrote, or that their bosses would so closely tie their out-of-work comments and behavior with the reputation of their employer to the degree that they deserved to lose their jobs. Users often turn to social networks to complain about work among their contacts, forgetting either that their colleagues are a part of that system, or that a quick online search can turn up such comments if they have not opted to make their information visible to only a few online connections.

A 2009 survey of 220 U.S. companies in a variety of industries found that nearly half are worried about information that could appear inappropriately on social networks. The same survey found that 45.1 percent of US companies surveyed were “concerned” or “very concerned” about posts to social networking sites as a potential conduit for data loss. More than half of U.S. companies reported that they have disciplined someone in the last year for violating email policies, and almost a third have terminated someone for those violations.\textsuperscript{21} Regarding social networks specifically, 17 percent of companies have disciplined staff for policy violations. Terminations were fewer than 10 percent, but most organizations also don't yet appear to have clearly defined policies regarding social networks as they do for email, which is typically handled by internal information
technology (IT) departments.

The data loss referenced in this study refers to specific confidential details like financial information or trade secrets. However, many companies are starting to create social media policies that outline what is appropriate in their eyes for disclosure, recognizing that the less concrete facts about a company, including employee’s feelings and comments on policy changes, corporate culture, and other opinion-based issues can be just as damaging if leaked to the public. They also recognize that social networks have the power to widely broadcast those damaging ideas in a very short time span, and the necessary clean up could be quite time consuming. Those policies usually only address corporate information, but in some cases companies are attempting to dictate how even personal information is depicted. This can leave employees in a quandary over what should be shared.

While companies are restricting access to social networks in the office, it’s not possible to restrict employee use entirely when people are off the clock. When the city of Bozeman, Montana tried to require job seekers to include all usernames and passwords for chat rooms, forums, user groups, or social networking sites in their applications, they were quickly assailed for violating the privacy of their applicants. They suspended the request shortly thereafter and apologized for “exceeding … that which is acceptable to our community.” Interestingly, such a request is actually a violation of the terms of service in many social websites, including Facebook, which was explicitly mentioned in the initial information request.

Moves like this expose the fear that employers have over the brave new world of
social media, but this clearly not a reasonable solution. Employees deserve a reasonable expectation of privacy because they are people first. Employers are undoubtedly entitled to dictate what happens on their time, and with their equipment, which is why I don’t believe restricting access to social media sites in the workplace is prima facie wrong. It’s impossible to expect that every company is going to understand and embrace social networks, or to be a part of them even if they do understand their use. There is nothing wrong with that position. But such knee jerk reactions can do more damage than an unintended online disclosure would.

If employers are not setting policies, how can staff be sure that their management is not observing what they do after hours, to use that information to make a determination as to whether or not someone is fit for a job? Of course, it is not an employer's responsibility to make sure that their staff doesn't violate a policy—ignorance of a rule is no defense against violating it, and an important issue with social networks is addressing the responsibility of users to take active control over their information. In most of these instances, better use of the built in methods to control who sees their information, combined with practical, reasonable guidelines for the type of information shared, could make a major difference in preventing these disclosure confusion from happening in the first place.

Who’s Watching?

A survey conducted in October 2009 by Robert Half Technology of more than 1,400 Chief Information Officers found that 54 percent of them completely prohibit use of social media in the workplace for any reason—personal or work-related. While that
number sounds large, this means that 46 percent of companies do not restrict social media access, which means a huge number of employees are free to access these sites at work, and may even be encouraged to do so.

Consulting giant Deloitte has conducted an Ethics and the Workplace Survey for the past three years, and the 2009 edition focused on reputational risk in the workplace due to social networks. It is important to note that the reputation in question is for companies and their brands, not individual employees. In the survey, 60 percent of executives surveyed said they have a right to know how employees are portraying themselves and their organizations online. Not content to just know what staff says about the company, they are taking interest in what staff says about themselves, and how that might impact the larger corporate reputation. At the same time, only 17 percent of companies have programs in place to monitor or mitigate potential risk, so while the concern is there, the proactive steps to address it are slow in coming, creating a hazardous knowledge gap for staff who might find themselves as the poster child for punishment over a damaging disclosure, even if it has nothing to do with work.

In the same survey, almost 75 percent of employees agreed that it is possible to damage their company’s reputation via social media. Still 61 percent of them said that even if their jobs were monitoring their activities, they would not change their behavior online—because they are already taking steps to self-censor what they share. Almost 50 percent said that company policies have no bearing on what they do online.

Suggesting the public abandon social media in exchange for job opportunities is
also not a reasonable solution, especially as the workforce grows younger. Instead, companies and their employees need to move quickly to strike a reasonable balance that gives each side the opportunity to understand how to best use or monitor activity, without infringing on personal rights. Education is probably the easiest solution, but research suggests that employees are skeptical about learning social networking from their jobs.

Again, this is most likely because many of the details on social networks are personal, and more and more people are dealing with negative consequences related to mixing business with pleasure. Online networks have become a key tool in tracing offline activity. An earlier survey on college student’s use of Facebook noted that it helps in organizing a real-life social network online. Since Facebook users interact with many of the other users directly in real life, often on a daily basis, the network of friends may also function as profile fact checker, potentially triggering questions about obviously erroneous information. In other words, taking a sick day may now lead offices to check Facebook pages or Twitter feeds for evidence of actual sickness. This new kind of fact checking has become an even bigger issue for people using social networks, as human resource departments now use social media accounts, in addition to resumes and references, to decide who is an appropriate candidate for jobs. The human resources director for the city of Bozeman said that hiring managers and staff have used social networking as a source of background information for about three years, and at least one applicant was denied employment as a result. Although the city has eliminated the password requirement, the article notes that they may add other requirements, including
asking applicants to add the city as a “friend” online so that it can still gain access to applicant profiles.

Employers who are proactively addressing how their employees use social networks are not engaged in some altruistic act to help their staffs—it is clear that these executives are concerned first and foremost with how their companies are perceived. A trade secret issue, for example, can cause a major headache for companies and become a boon for competitors. If a social networking profile is public it often includes information about employers (or the details needed to deduce that information). In a press release accompanying the Deloitte survey, CEO Sharon Allen said, “One-third of employees surveyed never consider what their boss or customers might think before posting material online. This fact alone reinforces how vulnerable brands are as a result of the increased use of social networks. As business leaders, it is critical that we continue to foster solid values-based cultures that encourage employees to behave ethically regardless of the venue.”

What is missing from this survey and many of the discussions on social media in the workplace, are clear tools on how employees should approach social networking. There are dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and plenty of water cooler conversations, which all generally boil down to “use common sense.” But since there is again no clear definition or rules on how that is applied in the workplace, employees remain at a loss.

Additionally, relying on business to create a values-based culture could be considered an oxymoron. Our current domestic and international financial crises came about to some degree from the unscrupulous behavior of everyone from CEOs to junior
staff at some of the companies who were once deemed the most respected and trustworthy in their industries. Even before that, high profile issues ranging from the fraud committed by Enron executives to the environmental damage caused by Exxon left the public skeptical about what moral and ethical standards businesses apply to their own dealings, and how they could be trusted to deal honestly with the public at large.

Many people have chosen to disclose personal lifestyle choices online, where it is not only visible to friends and family who may already know, but to total strangers who may be looking for information about someone. Those strangers could be led to apply their own moral beliefs to someone else's life, without that person ever knowing. Ultimately we must remember that in the end, companies are run by people with a full set of personal and professional beliefs, of their own, and no obligation to leave their preconceived notions behind in their decision making processes. Until employers create specific guidelines, either independently or collectively, that address the web, the evolving community standards that guide us offline will continue to guide most activity online as well.

Whatever the specifics of the situations, discretion was clearly lacking in some of those earlier mentioned cases of reprimands and firings. The victims failed to realize that peers who may share their feelings or sympathize with their predicaments are not the only people privy to their conversations. Again, is fostering a “values-based culture” a legitimate solution, when the values that matter most in an work-based relationship are those on the employer’s side?
As society moves toward a diversification of attitudes, attributes that may have been considered by some to be shameful at one time, such as sexual preferences, are now considered much more socially acceptable, becoming everyday topics of discussion. But not everyone shares the same degree of social progressiveness. Society is based on community standards, and each social group develops their own rules for governing the people in it. For many years it would have been possible to live in some major cities in the United States or around the world and rarely come into contact with people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds, or different religions, for example. So there would be very little need to understand or consider the standards that guide a different group. With the web our world is shrinking, and our contact with others is increasing whether or not we want it to, and this applies more than ever to the world of work.
CHAPTER THREE

REVEALING AND CONCEALING: WHAT IT MEANS AT WORK

The personal life of every individual is based on secrecy, and perhaps it is partly for that reason that civilized man is so nervously anxious that personal privacy should be respected.

Anton Chekov 1860-1904

As part of my research on this topic, I conducted a survey of 101 people on their usage of and ideas about social networks, both personally and professionally. While the survey is not statistically valid, it provided some invaluable insights into the thoughts of workers today on their experiences with social networks. The majority of the respondents were between ages 30 and 49, just the age range I see as experiencing the most workplace difficulties related to the Internet today (see Appendix A for demographic information).

The majority of my respondents are based in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region, which is known for being one of the most web-savvy parts of the country. The survey was distributed via email and social networks and conducted online, which further targeted a population comfortable with the Internet and conducting business online. I aimed for a slightly older set of respondents to try and capture more information on the experiences of older web users by reaching out to my personal and professional contact list, primarily because most of the information available today focuses on teens and the Internet and I wanted to capture anecdotes and experience from an older group.

Right away, several questions yielded answers revealing the great extent to which workplaces and employees are involved with social networks:

- 73 percent said their employers use social networks to promote their businesses or related activities;
• 75 percent of respondents are connected to their co-workers, including managers, via social networks;

• 89 percent of respondents are using privacy features to keep people from seeing some or all of the information they post. Of that, most people are attempting to keep things from the view of colleagues or managers.

• Among all respondents, the most commonly used social network is Facebook.

• The majority of respondents share information related to business or personal topics—the two areas that cause most the most issues related to work.

![Table 4: Which Social Networks Do You Use At Least Once Per Week?](image)

Through the analysis of my survey results, I found that in most cases behavior online does not correlate with the attitudes expressed. For example, 66 percent of respondents know someone personally who has been embarrassed by information found online, and about 25 percent of respondents know someone who has been disciplined in the workplace, but at the same the majority of respondents believe it is possible to maintain separate online professional and personal identities. The majority of respondents are not worried that they themselves are at any risk of “problems on the job” because of
information found online. However, since most of the respondents said they do not have a social media usage policy at their workplace, and have not ever been told even anecdotally what is appropriate to share in the absence of a policy, I think disciplinary issues cases will increase in the near future, and employees should remain vigilant with regard to protecting their information.

I believe that it is possible to maintain dual identities online, but it takes a great deal of work, and probably only for those who are the most computer-literate among us can successfully accomplish it. It is indeed possible to create separate accounts and never cross-contaminate them, but it takes a significant amount of thought and effort to achieve, and can raise real questions about why someone is working so hard to keep information private. Sites themselves also discourage the practice to some degree; Facebook does not allow people to create more than one account with the same email address, and if it
discovers that people create multiple pages under different emails, those users are banned and accounts deleted.

Almost 60 percent of respondents said that they spend up to two hours a day using social networks, which is a lot of time to devote to anything in our pressed-for-time society. Based on this, I would assume that many of them are able to log onto these networks while working, possibly from the office.

Nearly 80 percent of respondents also said that they were somewhat to extremely familiar with the privacy features of the social networks they use. This probably accounts for people’s sense that they are not at risk of disclosure issues at work, because they are protecting their information. Again, my respondents are more web savvy than average—almost 30 percent of respondents have used social networks for more than five years—but I must attribute some of that familiarity with privacy settings to overconfidence, based on the research cited in chapter two regarding the infrequencies with which people adjust default settings online.

As a part of my survey, I asked respondents whether they knew someone who had ever been embarrassed by material on a social network—65 percent responded yes. I further asked for a brief description of the embarrassment, and whether there was any fallout. Some of the responses included: “Illegal drug use was alluded to through words and photos, resulting in shame for the guilty;” Another wrote, “I spent time at a bar with a colleague after work where photos were taken and he felt embarrassed [sic] when I tagged him in those photos on Facebook and asked me to take them down.”
One respondent wrote: “A colleague posted her feelings on internal business actions taken at the newspaper where we work. The information was later printed by another paper to illustrate how unhappy employees at our newspaper were.” Another wrote about a colleagues secret vacation: “My colleague said she was working from home, but I then got FB status from her about being at the beach. Unless she bough [sic] a house on the beach, this was a case of not realizing that your co-workers might figure out where you are based on your FB status.” One other response revealed a lost chance at love: “My sister likes vampires and subscribes to all the True Blood and Twilight fan pages. My aunt called her and told her that she wanted her to meet an eligible guy that she worked with but when he looked at her profile on Facebook he thought her obsession with vampires was a bit weird and wasn't interested in meeting her anymore. My sister isn't weird at all, but based on all the vampire content on her page you would think she had a fascination with the dark side. She was embarassed [sic] that someone would have that impression of her.”

In each of these examples, and many of the others I reviewed, someone was embarrassed in their own eyes because of an assumption that someone made, or because of their own behavior, through information found online. I found it interesting that one of the answers included the word “shame” to describe how the exposed party felt. As a society, many people believe that being ashamed is something that does not occur very often, particularly among those who engage in online sharing. In the case of the person who posted information that was used by a rival newspaper, that individual caused exactly the sort of issue that employers are scared to death about. Internal information is
the lifeblood of the media, and with so many new sources of media today, writers and reporters are always seeking sources to give information before anyone else has it to break a big story, and in this case, reporters did not even have to do any work. While this was just one person’s opinion, it was used to denigrate the employer and cast a negative light on the competition—just the sort of disclosure employers in the Deloitte study are trying to avoid.

Without context, it is hard to imagine how comments from one person can have such a great impact on large corporate structures that they would feel the need to monitor them. Employees have to remember how frightening the potential disclosure of trade secrets is for a company who has worked long and hard to create. Someone can easily damage credibility with a simple statement, and the speed with which information can spread today is a major factor in erring on the side of caution for many firms—there are good reasons for companies to have somewhat restrictive email policies, for example, because of the risk of viruses that can invade corporate computers with the click of a button.

Many executives believe corporate reputations are intrinsically tied to the reputations of their employees, and keeping a close eye on their reputations has long seemed like a good idea. This is not a new concept—Thomas J. Watson, president of computer company IBM in the early 1900s, was known for reminding his employees decades ago that being a part of IBM required a high level of personal conduct because the reputation of the company was built on the people who worked for it, and that they
should not do anything in their professional or personal lives that would bring embarrassment to the firm.¹

While Watson’s admonitions are not as common in today’s workforce, employers have more tools than ever to monitor reputation-building or -busting behavior. Now that the Internet and social networks are so pervasive, it’s quite simple to keep track of employees. In fact, employees are often promoting their activities, possibly even sending information directly into the hands of the people they don’t want to see it. The accounts might be viewed as personal property, but without taking to conceal the information posted it can easily become part of the public domain and find its way into a manager’s hands.

In the survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents were using privacy features to keep a subset of connections from seeing all their shared data—colleagues, managers, classmates, teachers, and family members were among the groups receiving restricted access. Many people have also tried to straddle this gap by attempting to separate personal and professional lives online—for example, creating two Twitter accounts, one for work discussions, another for personal chats and following friends. Ultimately there is no easy way to distinguish between personal and private on social networks, but surprisingly in the same survey most respondents felt that it is quite easy to keep personal and professional lives separate online.

Whether or not those things were actually worthy of personal distress is debatable—for example, I don’t believe being photographed with a beer in hand constitutes a real need for concealing that information as long as the person is of legal age.
drinking age and behaving responsibly. Again, I think the embarrassment comes from not knowing in advance a picture will appear online, from losing control over the disclosure, even if it is depicting a situation that is perfectly normal in every other circumstance.

This is just more indication that we will not always be able to control our appearance online. We can make sure that we are taking steps to maintain our reputation—which most of us do every day in the course of our lives without thinking about it. And for those that decide to take the step to connect with family, friends and “frolleagues” (defined by Wired magazine as a work colleague friended on a social networking site and thus granted access to personal information, from blog entries to stag party pics, that may be perceived as less than professional—or even (if the frolleague happens to be a frupervisor) grounds for dismissal), we have to realize what we are giving up, and what we are gaining.

**Doing Unto Others**

Protection of reputation in the digital age also requires the support and compassion of others. It is not possible to control every embarrassing moment, whether it is accidental (like a slip and fall resulting in torn pants) or self-inflicted (passing out after drinking too much). There is a high level of civility and responsibility necessary that requires people to recognize that they can potentially hold a great deal of power over the way others are viewed, and that its their role to wield that power in a respectful manner.

Of course, with access to information, and such public ways to disseminate it, there is also the ability for the unscrupulous to bring harm to others. One survey respondent wrote that a friend had her unplanned pregnancy revealed on Facebook by
someone who wanted to hurt her. In this case, the victim was not sharing personal
information online, but because she was a part of the network, it became extremely easy
to get such private news out to her contacts.

While this friend engaged in some unsavory behavior by revealing this secret, it is
important to remember that social networking requires participation on both sides.
Implicit in the traditional definition of friends is a duty to protect each other’s interests.
But there is no guarantee that strangers will do the same, and many of those we connect
with online are not far off from that. As Facebook’s sociologist Marlowe noted, “What
may be tripping people up here is the language: while the people you’re connected to on
Facebook are called your “friends,” they’re more likely people you have met at some
point in your life.”

When there is not a personal connection to online contacts, the only alternative is
to use personal ethics to determine how to handle these situations, and hope others do the
same. The golden rule “do unto others as you would have them to do to you,” seems like
the best option to follow, but even that is not foolproof. There will always the joke that
some people think is funny but others will not laugh at, or are potentially even offended
by. I’m sure the person who posted the photo of Jon Favreau fondling the Hillary Clinton
cut-out thought that it was a hilarious moment that the people pictured would want to
relive, and why not? They were clearly having a good time in that moment. But that good
time may not always translate for others, and some people may not find it funny at any
time.

Where Reputation Lives
In all of these instances, reputation is the constant underlying concern. Reputation is a combination of character and behavior, and how people assess it depends on the context in which they view the relationships between those involved. In Favreau’s case, the Obama team must have realized that his character was not bad enough, and his past behavior good enough, to surmise that he would not make a similar, embarrassing mistake again. But the cheerleader for the New England Patriots probably did not have the same level of personal context with the owners of the team, who decided quickly to dismiss her. In that instance her good reputation, if she had one, did not speak for itself.

Reputation in and of itself is not a moral or ethical issue—it is something that only exists in the context of relationships with other people. It is relatively easy to develop a reputation, good or bad, and quite difficult to change. From earlier and earlier ages people are aware of it at all times. Well-behaved children are praised and invited to slumber parties, while the “bad kids” are denied play dates. In grade school, kids with reputations for being smart or polite are given opportunities that those considered bullies do not receive. In high school, college and the future are in sight, and reputation becomes more important than ever before.

Today finds parents seeking placement test tutoring for their three and four year old children to help their chances of getting into better kindergartens in New York City. This is definitely an anomaly, but it symbolizes that adults recognize the importance of a well-maintained reputation far more than younger people, for whom experience and experimentation is paramount, despite whatever consequences may occur. Reputations require a long view of the future, and a sixth sense on what others will think tomorrow of
your decisions today. For some actions, like illegal drug use, it's safe to assume that taking part in such behavior would not generate much respect or serve as a mark of good character. But will something seemingly more harmless, like volunteering for a cause or signing a petition, create problems later with people who disagree with those stances?

Very few people have an inkling of their goals that far into the future, and living life today to reach a future goal is not an ideal way of life for many people. Much of the beauty of life comes from its spontaneity, and missing the now in exchange for the future can drain the soul out of our daily lives. And still, parents and adults are always pushing and prodding young people in certain directions to ensure that the mistakes they made are not repeated. It can be a hard concept to grasp as a teenager that the past reflects on the present, and impacts the future. The Internet offers one of the first times where adults can view, often in near real time, how young people are making their own choices. With everything from suggestively worded email addresses to sexually explicit MySpace pages, adults are right to act on their own experience and encourage younger people to be smart about their decisions online.

At the same time, adults themselves should not fear social networks because of how they have seen young people using them. The fact is, adults still have the opportunity to set examples online as they do in offline settings. With something so pervasive as the World Wide Web, it makes sense that adults would use it differently because their normative principles aren’t the same, even with a difference as small as one generation. The Internet’s permanence can be a frightening prospect—theoretically, the Internet captures all information on it into perpetuity, so something stays there forever.
no matter who puts it there. No one can say that what 15-year-olds are sharing today
won’t be used against them 10 years from now, and by understanding social networks,
adults can better understand the benefits and risks through real world application, not
outdated judgment calls.

**Costs and Benefits**

There is a decision that must be made by those desiring to participate in life
online, and that is to recognize that giving up some degree of privacy in exchange for the
experience is a requirement. This does not mean that one must give away every secret
ever experienced, heard, seen, or thought in the course of a lifetime. But it does mean that
if someone is willing to participate, and are uncomfortable with the potential for adverse
repercussions, they need to be proactive in understanding how to protect themselves, and
create a standard by which they will select the information they choose to share.

The author of the personal branding book *Career Distinction* wrote that the key is
to become “selectively famous.” And even if fame is not the goal, acting selectively is
still a smart guideline to live by. Selectivity is paramount, especially when one of the
major complaints about social networks are the tell-it-alls who report every action or
thought. An easy way to avoid becoming one of those is to share only certain bits of
information.

While this might sound extreme, it is no different than what people do every day
when they consider what to tell friends at church, or coworkers, or any other subset of
individuals we come into contact with on a regular basis. It is such a common practice to
self-censor in some areas that we never think about it, it just happens naturally. For those
participating in social networks, the key is to remember that all of those subsets may have a representative in your network; someone from church, someone from work, and someone from school might all be Facebook friends. And the conversations with all three of them might be very different offline, so it is important to keep that in mind online. It is important to set a personal standard and stick to it—just because a friend shares every detail of her personal life on Twitter does not mean anyone else has to. Self-censorship is perfectly acceptable, and should be encouraged if needed.

It is also important to recognize that as social networkers, each individual has power over who is in his or her network. Again, it takes some time and research to learn how to limit who sees what, or to remove someone from a network altogether, but ultimately that power rests with each person. It is perfectly acceptable to ignore a friend request from someone who doesn’t need to have access to your information—whether or not that information is filtered. Unfriend was selected as the word of the year in part because it is such a commonly used term among social networkers today. People should think of social networks as their home, and use the same degree of mindfulness about who is allowed in as they would if someone knocked on your door. And if you want to allow some people in the foyer that works, but maybe just a select few (or no one) is allowed upstairs.

Another possible repercussion of oversharing is that colleagues may feel closer to someone because they have so much access to their personal details online, and bring up subjects that are not typically discussed among people who consider themselves more colleagues than friends. Being friendly with colleagues has its degrees, from those you
might join for lunch or coffee during office hours, to those you meet with after work for dinner or drinks, to those you vacation with or even have intimate relationships with. But again, historically those relationships could be compartmentalized to some degree. With social networks, all your relationships begin on an equally visible plane, and it is up to the user to build those compartments—otherwise your boss might think it is perfectly appropriate to ask you details of your latest family vacation all because she read your tweets or Facebook status updates about what you did while you were away. If someone doesn’t agree, it is his or her responsibility to proactively keep that from happening.

By taking more control over who we engage with online and what we share with them, we can truly enjoy our experience and feel more empowered, not less. There are benefits to being a part of social networks that people may be unnecessarily denying themselves from in an effort to protect their identity, when in fact the confidentiality surrounding who we are and what we do is rapidly disappearing—as Bok noted all the way back in 1983, “confidentiality, though as strenuously invoked as in the past, is turning out to be a weaker reed than ever.”\(^6\) Anyone who has ever typed his or her own name into Google’s search engine to see what comes up knows this. There is a lot of information out there coming from multiple sources, whether or not the person in question has shared it. As a society we are already moving from an interpersonal sense of reputation to a data-driven one, and social media is a great way to control your data online to some degree, by pushing out the information that you want seen.

**Technological Solutions**
Just as this technology has given us multiple ways to communicate, the risks can be real. Therefore, a smart social networker takes time in advance to understand both the risks and ways to avoid them, without needing to there are also multiple ways to use its privacy features as well. For the person who does not want managers seeing him enjoy a beer after work, he has several choices:

- Tell friends not to take pictures of him, or if they do, not to share them online
- Create a list of managers and other people he does not want to see him, and block their access on Facebook
- Create a completely private profile so that his photos cannot be tagged
- Do not join social networks.

Any of these options are legitimate choices. The first step should be education on how social networks operate, and how they can be successfully used. A natural place to obtain that additional training is at the office, where we are often taught new skills to support our work, and that we can ultimately add to the list of skills we have obtained. Surprisingly, my survey found that less than one-third of respondents were interested in receiving training on social networks at work—65 percent responded no when asked.

Table 6: Would you like training on how to use social networks from your employer?
I imagine this attitude stems from the idea of keeping information away from the prying eyes of coworkers. People are not interested in a paternalistic boss guiding their every step outside of the workplace as they do in it. But this presumes that there is a way to keep both worlds separated, which my respondents were clearly on the fence about—(see chart below). An alternative solution would be for more people to consider understanding social networks as a career benefit. Since so many organizations are using it to promote their services, by understanding them employees can find natural ways to support those efforts, or at least understand what they mean during meetings and other conversations.

At the same time, more than 70 percent of respondents said that their workplaces engaged in promoting their work or services online (see Appendix B), which begs the question of who is responsible for supporting those promotional efforts, and whether companies are putting themselves at risk by not educating staff on how to best support organizational goals.

The issue with social networking is primarily one of power with regard to its use in the workplace. Are employers exercising undo harm over their staffs by not clearly stating from the beginning their expectations? Obviously no one could have predicted how business would adopt the Internet for everyday use, but if employers are monitoring their staffs at all, it seems unfair to hold people accountable to some unknown standard. This is another form of secrecy—the secret being that unless there is a clear policy, no one really knows how an employer will respond to whatever it deems inappropriate. The
“I’ll know it when I see it” attitude puts anyone whose career is dependent on others at risk. If someone is seen in photos using drugs, and works for a company that has a zero-tolerance policy, that obviously falls under grounds for dismissal. But if an employee is photographed in a Halloween costume that offends management, there are not any clear policies to address those grey areas yet.

The social networks themselves should also take greater strides toward educating people on how to best use them. For example, Facebook lists make it possible to prevent groups of people from seeing any photo or video someone is tagged in, so no one need worry that their boss will see their questionable costume choices. Unfortunately, most Networks do not make it easy to learn how to do this, and in Facebook’s case, the privacy settings change often enough that its quite time consuming to keep up. In my opinion, LinkedIn.com does the best job of teaching account holders of how to utilize its functionality. LinkedIn is also the site that was created by and for career professionals looking for networking and job opportunities, who are naturally in an older demographic. The site includes hints along the way to remind people of the implications of those connections; for example, when you send an invitation to add someone to your network you are reminded: Important: Only invite people you know well and who know you. Find out why. The image below details in simple language what a connection means, so users are well informed at every step.
Figure 6: LinkedIn's method of informing users about the best kinds of connections to make

Although it is not the network’s responsibility to train us on how to use it, a more robust entry-level education, at the point of registration, would be useful. Whether or not people use it is up to them, but it would probably help to limit complaints on the back end. When Twitter initially launched users were required to begin a private message they intended for only one user, also known as a direct message, with the letters DM followed by the user’s name. Unfortunately forgetfulness, errors and typos meant many messages written for only some eyes were broadcast to anyone looking. The trend of private messages going public became known as the DM Fail, and it took a website highlighting many personal tweets going public to get the site to change how direct messages are sent, making it easier to get them to the intended target. There is another site that exposes similar Facebook flubs. With more education, some of these issues could be greatly reduced.

**Community Standards—Online and Offline**
There is no sieve that we can push our online experience through to find the truth waiting from what appears. Using social media is always relational experience; it is never absolute. The best we can do is find some rules that gets us close to where we want to be, and squeeze and tweak until it fits our individual needs. With all the talk about the risks of social networking it is easy to forget that ultimately there is a lot of fun to be had with them. While adults might not be as interested in creating highly customized MySpace pages, Twitter allows users to create custom pages for their accounts, to bring a little spice to their social networking.

It becomes more and more obvious as new forms of media emerge that we are seeing drastically different views of the world into our homes and lives each day. One of the issues with the web is that it shines a light so brightly on areas that people once felt should remain private, like issues of sexuality. The problem is that while every community has its standards, very few people can clearly depict what they are beyond some of the most obvious infractions that violate them, like murder or child molestation. Online, jokes, videos or photographs are judged by a completely subjective set of guidelines that are different for each viewer.

Many web sites have their own versions of community standards: the popular virtual reality site Second Life has six overarching rules that govern its world—users must refrain from intolerance, harassment, assault, disclosure, adult groups (unless they are in a specific predetermined area), and disturbing the peace. Under each of those headings are more details, but no specific rules are laid out, and the site adds, “Within
Second Life, we want to support Residents in shaping their specific experiences and making their own choices.”

The largest social networks do not have formally spelled out community standards, which go well beyond the standard Terms Of Service that most people do not read anyway when creating new accounts, to get at the heart of what kind of community a site aims to be, as with Second Life above. Until there are explicit guidelines, the stress for older social networkers trying to maintain their reputations on the job must continue to be balanced against their desire to catch up with old friends and family, or make new friends online. One potential solution to aid all employee groups is to create a standard set of social networking guidelines that employers can disseminate to their employees, similar to the TRUSTe guidelines Facebook and other websites follow to protect user data. Relying on an outside entity to develop the guidelines would help employers of all sizes adopt systems that can be readily applied, externally verified, and most of all, don’t have the arbitrary standards that subjective rules do.

While community standards are helpful as guiding principles, a more explicit set of rules will help workers recognize their responsibilities, and create a sort of “Good Housekeeping” seal of approval for companies to aspire to. While we might like to believe that both individuals and their employers can be counted on to do the right thing, the fact remains that we often have laws in place to remind people of what the right thing is, and to punish them when they go too far beyond those established norms.

Companies may suggest that they do not need guidelines because they are not engaged in using social media on a regular basis for business-related activities, or
because they trust that their employees will do the right thing. However, I would imagine that in the near future most companies will find themselves in a place where they have to address some web related issue, either external or internal, and a proactive approach would help alleviate the stress of having to possibly make an on-the-fly decision on how to address an issue after it arises.

Typically older generations are the ones that set the standards for morality and behavior in society. With social networks, teens have taken the lead in such standard setting in part because they are the group who most intimately understand them, and have had the chance to be a part of the organic development of the implicit and explicit rules that come about. I think this also partially explains why teens have stayed away from the social networks that adults are more active on, like Twitter; adults are creating the rules and removing the opportunity for younger users to be involved, which also takes away some of their excitement over joining in the first place.

I believe the time has passed for those who consider social networks a trend or a fad. As we continue to become more technologically advanced, I think we will see a new kind of digital divide separating those who have joined and are experienced with them, and those who are not. Unlike some web pundits I would not go as far as those who say that unless you are online you do not exist, but for most people in business or professional fields that may be closer to the truth than we care to admit.

One of our current administration’s biggest goals is a national broadband expansion plan that seeks to bring high-speed Internet access to the entire country as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the stimulus bill
that passed in early 2009. Despite the prevalence of Internet access in major cities and urban areas, and the dramatic uptick in adoption in the past decade, large parts of the country are still without access to fast and reliable web connections. The United States is currently 15th among developed nations in broadband access, which experts say hinders our growth in global technology markets.

I believe this same sort of hindrance trickles down to individuals without access. Those who are not familiar with the current web trends to some degree are going to be left behind. We must consider what is the right entity or method to create the guidelines we need to educate wider sectors of the public about the benefits and risks of social networks. Although I do not think federal regulations are appropriate to help address online community standards, the federal government can help move progress forward by playing a major role. This administration has already shown itself to be extremely tech savvy, having leveraged social networks to secure a victory in last year’s election. This is the first administration in history to have both a Chief Technology Officer and a Chief Information Officer, and several of the leading positions in Obama’s cabinet are held by people with strong technology backgrounds, including several appointees formerly with Google, Microsoft, and other respected technology companies. Earlier this year, the White House invited Twitter co-founder and CEO Evan Williams to attend a summit of young business leaders to discuss the financial crisis, again symbolizing the degree to which these networks have impacted our world.

While anything beyond a convening role would probably be seen as over-politicizing the issue, bringing together non-governmental experts to begin the discussion
could be a simple act with significant meaning. Government at all levels has always played a role in legislating moral behavior in the United States. In most cases those laws have been put in place after long, hard battles among groups seeking extra protections viewed as civil rights, but other laws are created proactively to address potential harms, like issues with business or financial transactions.

With this ever-networked future in mind, the time is now to develop consistent standards and educational opportunities, like the TRUSTe-style guidelines I mentioned above. These suggested guidelines could also be developed in such a way that they are flexible enough to meet the needs of a variety of organizations. Schools, for example, recognize cyber bullying as one of the major issues young students deal with today, and federal anti-cyber bullying legislation has been introduced to provide greater punishments for perpetrators and protection for victims. While the government clearly cannot and should not be looking over shoulders in libraries and classrooms making sure students treat each other respectfully, government action can serve as an awareness call for parents, teachers, and students, and can encourage organizations to take up the cause on the ground.

Whatever our solutions are, as a society we need to move toward them quickly. During the lifespan of this project I have seen or heard the number of questions and concerns over our privacy increase dramatically, leaving me to feel just as Sissela Bok did when she wrote in *Secrets*, in 1983, before any social networks even existed, “My second conviction, far stronger at the end than at the beginning of my work on this subject, is one of urgency. The conflicts over secrecy may be perennial, but the
accelerating pace of technological innovation and the present worldwide political tensions are now unsettling the already precarious standards for keeping, probing, and revealing secrets. . . . This poses extensive threats to individual privacy.”

If these kinds of issues were already urgent then, they are life threatening now. Livelihoods are at stake, and while some experts believe that in the future leaders will have to ignore social media blunders as a criteria for exclusion because so many people will have committed them there will be no one left to choose from, that is not a chance that the millions of social networkers should be willing to take. There are ways to protect share information and protect reputations, without fear of the technology that surrounds us. We have a moral obligation to ourselves and to others to make sure that our standards of living are not completely ignored just because we embrace a new medium of communication. Recognizing this and acting on it today will help our entire community move forward as a whole, not just the lucky few who are able to ride the wave of technology into future.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


6The Hour with George Stroumboulopoulos, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWpnto-hqQ


Ibid., 77.


Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations (Glencoe: Free Press), 1964.


Livingstone, “Taking Risky Opportunities.”

Ibid., 406.


Ibid., 402.


29. Bok, Secrets, 84.


32. Bok, Secrets, 8.


CHAPTER TWO


8. Ibid.
Ibid.


13 Bok, Secrets.


15 According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force participation rate of people 55 and older averaged 40.0% for the first six months of 2009. That is the highest rate since 1961, when it stood at 40.8%.


Acquisti & Gross, “Information Revelation and Privacy in Online Social Networks,” 76.


CHAPTER THREE

1 Men, minutes, money: a collection of excerpts from talks and messages, Thomas J. Watson, 1929.


6Bok, Secrets, 117.


8Bok, Secrets, 284.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Social Networks & The Workplace

Thank you for taking this brief survey about your use of social networks. This survey should about 3 minutes, and is designed to capture information on use of social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn, along with how these networks relate to your professional life.

Your responses will be compiled for a graduate thesis project at Georgetown University. All information is confidential, and participation is voluntary. If you have any questions, please contact lcs32@georgetown.edu.

Thank you,
Lesly C. Simmons
MA, Ethics and the Professions
Georgetown University

How much time do you spend using social networks daily? *
☐ 0-1 Hours
☐ 1-2 Hours
☐ 2-3 Hours
☐ 3-4 Hours
☐ 4-5 Hours
☐ 5+ Hours

Which social networks do you use at least once per week? *Check all that apply
☐ Facebook
☐ Twitter
☐ LinkedIn
☐ MySpace
☐ FriendFeed
☐ Ning
☐ Other
What kinds of information do you share on those social networks? *Check all that apply
☐ Business information
☐ Educational details
☐ Personal details
☐ Political views
☐ Professional details
☐ Travel or vacation plans
☐ Other

How familiar are you with privacy settings for the social networks you use? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not familiar at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Extremely familiar

Have you used those privacy settings to keep some people from seeing information you post? *
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don’t Know

If yes, why? Select all that apply
☐ To keep information from colleagues/managers
☐ To keep information from friends
☐ To keep information from family
☐ To keep information from classmates

How long have you been using social networks? *
☐ 1 Year or Less
☐ 1-2 Years
☐ 2-3 Years
☐ 3-4 Years
☐ 4-5 Years
☐ 5+ Years
☐ I Don’t Use Social Networks
☐ I Can’t Remember
Have you known anyone who has been embarrassed by information posted on a social network? *
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If yes, who? *
- Friend
- Colleague
- Family member
- Classmate
- Other

Please share a brief description of what occurred

How important are social networks to your PERSONAL life? *

1  2  3  4  5
Not important at all  Absolutely critical

Do you believe its possible to keep personal and professional lives separate online? *

1  2  3  4  5
Definitely  Definitely not

Have you ever asked someone to remove information about you from a social network? *
- Yes
- No
Social Networks at Work

How important are social networks to your PROFESSIONAL life? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not important at all  Absolutely critical

Does your workplace have a social media policy for employees? *

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don't know

Has anyone in your workplace discussed what information to share on social networks? *

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don't know

How concerned are you that something about you online could cause problems on the job? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not worried at all  Extremely concerned

Are you connected to your co-workers on social networks? *

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don't know

Do you know someone who has lost a job or been disciplined because of information found online? *

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don't know
Would you like training on how to use social networks from your employer? *
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Does your employer use social networks to promote its business or related activities?
*  
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Demographic Details

Age *
- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60 and over

Gender *
- Female
- Male

What is your zip code?
APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESPONSES

How much time do you spend using social networks daily?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1 hours</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 hours</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ hours</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which social networks do you use at least once per week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FriendFeed</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

What kinds of information do you share on those social networks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business information</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational details</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal details</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political views</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional details</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel or vacation plans</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.
How familiar are you with privacy settings for the social networks you use?

1 - Not familiar at all  6  6%
2                      11  11%
3                      20  20%
4                      34  34%
5 - Extremely familiar 30  30%

Have you used those privacy settings to keep some people from seeing information you post?

Yes [89]  88%
No  [12]  12%
I don't know [0]  0%

If yes, why?

To keep information from colleagues/managers  84  95%
To keep information from friends  32  36%
To keep information from family  25  28%
To keep information from classmates  26  30%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.
How concerned are you that something about you online could cause problems on the job?

1 - Not worried at all: 30 (30%)
2: 39 (39%)
3: 19 (19%)
4: 6 (6%)
5 - Extremely concerned: 7 (7%)

Are you connected to your co-workers on social networks?

- Yes: 75 (74%)
- No: 24 (24%)
- I don't know: 2 (2%)

Do you know someone who has lost a job or been disciplined because of information found online?

- Yes: 25 (25%)
- No: 69 (68%)
- I don't know: 7 (7%)

Would you like training on how to use social networks from your employer?

- Yes: 29 (29%)
- No: 65 (64%)
- I don't know: 7 (7%)

- Yes [29]
Social Networks at Work

How important are social networks to your PROFESSIONAL life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does your workplace have a social media policy for employees?

- Yes: 19 (19%)
- No: 56 (55%)
- I don’t know: 26 (26%)

Has anyone in your workplace discussed what information to share on social networks?

- Yes: 33 (33%)
- No: 57 (56%)
- I don’t know: 11 (11%)
- I don’t know: 33 (33%)
Gender

- Female [80] 79%
- Male [21] 21%

What is your zip code?

Number of daily responses

10/20/2009 to 11/16/2009
Detailed Responses to Survey Question:

Please share a brief description of what occurred
(Note: these responses are included as presented by respondents, and include some grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors)

- Several - breakups announced on Facebook
  - Pics of drunken nights and parties
  - Strangely some pics involving what I believed to be indecent exposure...
  - Co-workers/managers seeing pics and information and (as a result of having access) assuming that the relationship extended to a personal, friendship level. This resulted in discussions about things in the workplace that the person would not have voluntarily brought up with certain people there.

- Happens all the time. People don't like photos posted of them, so they un-tag themselves. Nothing really extreme like you hear about in the news though.

- Left account logged in at campus library; next person to use the computer read and shared messages from personal inbox

- tons of times! posting about ex's or posting while drunk. Insulting someone, who later finds out. Accidentally posting publicly, when intended to be private.

- Friends have been embarrassed by pictures taken at parties and posted on Facebook where family or employers could see.

- Some less than flattering photos of several classmates in compromising situations were uploaded on FB

- Information that she did not want shared was posted on someone's wall.

- Boss found out they were not working. And a friend's change in relationship status embarrassed him and cause him to start using friends list so only certain people could see that information.

- Pictures that were likely better kept for private, personal consumption were opened up for public viewing.

- A not so flattering picture of a friend of mine was posted, and tagged on Facebook.

- Photos were tagged in Facebook that showed friend or colleague in a situation they did not want to share with others
• A friend's unplanned pregnancy was revealed on Facebook by someone who found out and wanted to hurt her

• Embarrassing photos

• My colleague said she was working from home, but I then got FB status from her about being at the beach. Unless she bought a house on the beach, this was a case of not realizing that your co-workers might figure out where you are based on your FB status.

• Pictures posted that were not appropriate for public view at large.

• Insulting information was posted by a stranger about a colleague (now close friend) and my colleague found it after the fact. She was humiliated and had to deal with result of the lies a stranger had posted about her.

• I have seen bachelorette pics...very NSFW

• A colleague posted her feelings on internal business actions taken at the newspaper where we work. The information was later printed by another paper to illustrate how unhappy employees at our newspaper were.

• She had embarrassing photos from college and her new boss saw them on her site.

• Sorority got in trouble due to illegal activities being posted on the internet

• Embarrassing photos

• Comments by others on wall that were embarrassing and so were then promptly removed.

• Friend posted an embarrassing profile picture

• Nothing very consequential.. but friends have been embarrassed of posted pictures on Facebook and have had to “de-tag”

• Someone hacked into the person's account and told people that she had Herpes.

• Embarrassing photos; status updates that are too personal

• A comment was made on someone's Facebook page by a friend that almost got them fired.
• They got fired.

• Aspects of a dissolving relationship were posted

• General TMI that was not well received

• I find that people put a lot of their personal business on Facebook and Twitter. Just this week, I saw one person put they were attending their court date for a felony charge, and someone else who discussed the details of a bad break-up, this has no place in social networking.

• A friend was tagged in a photo that wasn't very flattering.

• They made the mistake of posting photos of themselves having a good time while taking a “sick day.”

• My cousin posted revealing photos of herself and also talked about a boyfriend no one knew about and a pregnancy no one knew about.

• My sister likes vampires and subscribes to all the True Blood and Twilight fan pages. My aunt called her and told her that she wanted her to meet an eligible guy that she worked with but when he looked at her profile on Facebook he thought her obsession with vampires was a bit weird and wasn't interested in meeting her anymore. My sister isn't weird at all, but based on all the vampire content on her page you would think she had a fascination with the dark side. She was embarrassed that someone would have that impression of her.

• I have a cousin who's embarrassed by just about any photo you “tag” of her.

• Pictures posted that both friends/family did not want shared.

• I spent time at a bar with a colleague after work where photos were taken and he felt embarrassed when I tagged him in those photos on Facebook and asked me to take them down.

• It was actually me. I had a picture posted of me that was taken as a joke, and got posted on Facebook. Out of context, I looked really silly and asked my friend to take it down, but the damage was already done.

• Illegal drug use was alluded to through words and photos, resulting in shame for the guilty.

• TMI was given and the person felt exposed
• I have a friend who felt compelled to remove several pictures of her drinking at a party when a potential employer (friend-of-friend) friended her on Facebook.

• Someone announced their engagement on Facebook, before having a chance to tell their family members and the family members did not appreciate them telling the entire world before they were notified.

• colleague wrote something about another colleague and got caught

• The individual hit reply all - and the information that they added only needed to go to one person but it went out to several. Out of the several one of the individuals was being discussed in further detail and they were able to see what was said about them.

• In both instances, personal information was posted to a friend's wall--and the poster didn't know that the wall could be seen by all.

• she was a new manager and basically bashed her inferiors on her job, suggesting they were bad at their jobs and used some sexual references to make the point. A friend of a friend found it and reported it to the highest authority on the job. She was reprimanded but not fired. She was a communications employee. The interesting part to me is she didn't truly grasp how bad it was for her to bash inferiors on-line. I do think she learned from it, but it took her several managers above her and colleagues talking to her to convince her that that was something she shouldn't have done. She also had tension for months with another co-worker manager because she aligned the other manager to her comments.

• A colleague who is a terrible event planner received some posts on FB showcasing here ineptitude. Am employee's jilted fiancé has posted a lot of information on the site begging for her to come back to him.

• A picture was posted of her drunk at a party.

• I had made a comment at work about something that had happen to me and my co-workers around me heard it. One co-worker thought she was sending a message to another co-worker but it was to me instead and she made a comment to the fact that “I just want someone to feel sorry for me”. When I asked her if she menat to send that comment to me, she said oh no she thought she was talking to someone else. She was busted.

• spoke about a vacation trip with friends and the employer found out that the person was not sick but on vacation

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• A colleague thought she was sending a private message griping about her supervisor but it wasn't private and colleagues and her supervisor saw it.

• New teacher had pics of a beer party while in college - a parent thought it was with HS age girls, which he now teaches

• Said something they did not intend to say to the world
BIBLIOGRAPHY


