

Maintaining Professional Boundaries in Social Media

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Deciding whether to friend employers or colleagues is a decision that you will need to make when entering your career. Maintaining professional boundaries is important for maintaining a healthy work-life balance and developing privacy. The decision of where you'd like your professional boundaries to be drawn is your own, but understand that as you enter your first position you may be creating precedence.

When you secure a position, remember if you are given a computer or laptop from the company, you hold no privacy on that computer and the company has the right to monitor what websites are being viewed and what information is saved on the computer. Individuals have been fired for misuse of their company computer, so be aware of the policy of your employer.

With the ever-evolving expectations created in the digital age, especially the ability to be contacted at any moment in time, drawing professional boundaries becomes especially important when attempting to balance work and life responsibilities. Deciding when and how you are going to allow yourself to be contacted is important for maintaining personal and emotional health.

Finally, does a company have a legal right to ask for your Facebook/social media website password? The evolving laws surrounding this question are different in every state, so be aware of the laws in the state in which you are applying. You may be wondering what you should do in a state where an employer is legally allowed to request your passwords, and this depends on a few things. First of all, you can politely refuse, which could sound something like, "I'd prefer to keep my private and professional life separate; it is important to me to maintain professional boundaries." If the employer insists, you will have to either comply or seek other employment. Don't be spontaneous: carefully consider your choices, and remember that finding a job is easier when you already have a job.

WFMY-TV, a CBS affiliate out of Greensboro, N.C., recently reported on this issue, stating: "[We] asked attorney David Freedman for his take on the legal liability. ' You have every right to say, "I don't want to give that information to you. I'm not giving you my Facebook password.'" And the employer can say, "That's great. I respect your privacy, I'm not going to hire you,"" said Freedman. Freedman said in North Carolina, that's perfectly legal. He said it's not discrimination for an employer not to hire an employee who won't turn over their password. He said it's actually more like protection for employers, who want to know who they're hiring. 'I'm an employer. I don't necessarily want to know everything about the people who work in my law firm, but I certainly would be very fearful of them having something on Facebook that would create an embarrassment for both them and for my firm,' he said."

Again, the decision is your own. You will need to weigh your personal privacy versus the need for employment and make the decision that best fits into your current place in life.

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