

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Social media and your coworkers: To friend or not to friend

To say that social media is now part of everyday life would be an understatement. What was once a leisurely side activity has become a veritable necessity: 60% of North Americans have at least one social media account, and are more connected with people than ever before. As social media increasingly plays a role in our lives, many questions arise about boundaries. One of the trickiest, most delicate and indeed the most important of these social media conundrums is: should and/or how to include colleagues in our social media lives. Should you accept your coworker's friend request? Should you let the people you work beside follow you on Twitter or Instagram? There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to answering these questions, but they are important questions that demand some careful thought. Here are some things to consider before a few easy clicks have you sharing more than you would like with the people you work with.

Different platforms, different rules. Different social media technologies may have different "feelings" for some people, and fit in differently to their lives. While your Twitter may be pretty simple and impersonal, your Instagram account might feel more like a diary. It is perfectly acceptable to grant your coworkers access to one while keeping the other more personal.

Sometimes it is a generational question. Millennials grew up with social media in one way or another, and as such have a different relationship to it than baby boomers or gen x'ers. Millennials are often at home in digital media and feel less of a private/public divide, allowing them to feel more comfortable sharing their online personas with their real life coworkers. If social media was something you encountered a little later in life, it may feel strange for you to share this facet of yourself with your colleagues. Respect your own boundaries, and recognize the generational differences that are at play.

Consistency is key. Inevitably we will have some coworkers who feel more like friends, and others we aren't so fond of, but if you are picking and choosing who to you will accept as a friend and who you won't, you might run into hurt feelings and awkward conversations. If you are going to implement a rule such as "no friending coworkers", stick to it across the board.

Don't post what you don't want to be seen. Despite privacy settings and whom your friend or follower list includes, always be mindful about posting complaints about your workplace, tirades about your boss, or pleas for a new place of employment. Even if your posts get personal, keep in mind that they might be seen by people you work with, and proceed accordingly.

Stay logged out when you're clocked in. Once you accept friend or follower requests, the people you work with will begin to see your online activity. Of course this sounds like common sense, but keep it in mind when you consider posting something while you are actually at work. While it is implicitly understood that most of us do check our social media accounts during work hours, it can appear unprofessional. Save those posts for your lunch break or for when the work day is done.

Social media and its many uses is still a relatively new technology, and we haven't quite caught up with it in terms of figuring out how to use it. However, there is no question that it is powerful and can affect your mental health. Pay attention to how you feel and never do anything you aren't comfortable with. If you aren't sure about whether you want to make that colleague a "friend", give it time: their request will still be there next week.

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