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How to Avoid Getting Fired by Facebook

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Everything is public. Act as though it is going to be on the front page of the *New York Times* tomorrow. Facebook just announced that in a matter of a few days or weeks, it will become indexed by the colossal Google search engine. People are now also able to search for listings from the welcome page without first signing up as a member. Welcome to the front page! Beware of what you air in places like Facebook or Twitter that have become easily searchable, fairly permanent and highly public.

People are losing their jobs over this. Penn State's *Daily Collegian* columnist Zach Good was fired over comments made regarding a cancer fundraiser. His editor in chief wrote in a blog post, "Anyone has the right to free speech. No one has the right to be employed at a newspaper. That is a privilege." Canadian grocery chain employees Devon Bourgeois and James Woodwere fired for making wisecracks admitting theft.

Here is a list of things you should do (or not do) in online venues like Facebook:

1. **Don't do it during work time unless you have permission to do so.** Better yet, don't use it at work unless you think it will get you a raise. Commission sales people are less likely to get in trouble over this than someone working in the accounting department.

2. **Don't post anything that you wouldn't feel comfortable posting or discussing in the lunchroom at work.** Some people got busted for posting photographs of things that went on at parties.

3. **Remove comments posted by others that can get you into trouble.** Edit them directly or ask whoever posted them to remove them.

4. **Raise your privacy settings.** Be mindful that these settings only prevent the average user from digging out the information. Assume there is a chance that the information can still leak out.

NOTE: This article has bee edited from its original version (for use in PSY 532 course).

5. **Do not ever admit to anything even remotely resembling a crime.** Cops and prosecutors know how to use Facebook as well as anyone. You'll have a hard time undoing such an admission, even if done as a joke. If your boss doesn't really like you, Facebook might become a good place to turn to find dirt that can be used to get rid of you.

6. **Don't disclose personal information that you are not comfortable having out there.** Birthdates are a crucial piece of information used to identify people that might be better left out of your profile.

7. **Monitor your information.** Google your name often, set up alerts and let people know what your expectations are for personal information. Let your close friends know where you stand so there are fewer issues. This is especially important for the photo junkies who like posting potentially embarrassing photos that may have you in one or more of them.

8. **Be considerate of others when you are posting things.** If your friend just started a new job as a Whitehouse intern, don't start posting stuff that won't make it past the watchdogs.

9. **Don't discuss confidential stuff online.** If you aren't sure, err on the side of caution. Don't be afraid to ask someone before going ahead and posting something.

10. **Be careful if you mix your personal and business online.** People often make the mistake of carelessly mixing personal and business contacts. Be somewhat more conservative with your business than your personal contacts to minimize this source of potential problems.

If you like your job and don't want to get fired, be careful how you use Facebook or one or the many tools like it. Use these above suggestions and your profile will become positively enhanced. Many employers, including the CIA, are turning to these tools as part of their recruiting arsenal. If you use them well, you might be hearing "You're Hired."