

# How to Avoid Sabotaging Your Job

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In today's workplace, there are more ways to damage your career than ever before. An errant tweet. An erroneous Facebook post. A heated email exchange. All of these can sully an otherwise impeccable reputation, as can a litany of faux pas in front of your coworkers.

Workplace expert Alexandra Levit, author of "How'd You Score That Gig?," shares her insights for avoiding the stumbling blocks and temptations that inhabit our work lives and work spaces.

## **1. Keep your focus on the networking part of social networking.**

She says, "You have to set boundaries as to how you use various social networks (e.g. Facebook for personal, LinkedIn for professional) and make sure you communicate those boundaries so that feelings aren't hurt." While Facebooking has become a part of many people's workdays, Levitt says, "Don't let your boss and coworkers catch you chatting and playing with Facebook applications when you should be working."

## **2. Avoid sending a tweet in the heat of the moment.**

Twitter is a great tool to help raise your reputation. Levitt advises, "Use your real name on Twitter to network with people you wouldn't have the chance to communicate with in real life, and send them valuable information or interesting tidbits about their field. Just don't get caught up in the heat of the moment. Before you post something on Twitter, think about whether you'd want to read it on the front page of the Wall Street Journal."

## **3. Finding friends at the office is fine -- but don't look for love.**

You spend a lot of time at the office, so it may be tempting to become involved with a colleague. She states, "You can pursue friendships in other departments and with friends of your coworkers, but don't ever date a boss or a direct report. And refrain from dating an immediate coworker unless you can handle seeing that person every day if the relationship goes south."

## **4. Appearances count around the office.**

Don't let casual Fridays be your fashion downfall. Levit, also the author of "Success for Hire," says, "Pay attention to what constitutes business casual in your workplace (i.e. what others are wearing) and dress accordingly -- although business casual usually means khakis and a button-down shirt. And no matter what the trend du jour is, "Don't ever wear short-shorts or flip-flops to work."

## **5. Practice proper email etiquette.**

Almost everyone has trouble managing their inboxes these days, so don't be so quick to send unnecessary emails -- or those that might stir the pot around the office. She counsels, "Only 'reply to all' if every person on the string really needs to hear what you're saying. Always check the list of people in the 'to' and 'cc' lines before sending any e-mail. Don't hit reply too quickly in case that reply-to-all function is accidentally on, and don't use e-mail for negative or controversial discussion."

## **6. Think before you speak.**

Converse carefully with coworkers, especially at first. "Spend more time listening than you do speaking. Show an interest in other people, but don't discuss anything that you wouldn't talk

about with your grandmother or religious officiant -- especially with a coworker you don't know extremely well. In general, steer clear of sex, drugs, and politics," she reveals.

#### **7. It's good to be heard -- but not all the time.**

Watch your volume control around the office. And don't be afraid to speak up if someone else's volume is distracting you. Levit urges, "Say nicely that you're on the phone with a client and ask if he wouldn't mind keeping it down a bit. Never allow your desire to avoid confrontation affect your work effectiveness."

#### **8. Just say "no" to complaining.**

Everyone has complaints at the office, but it may be best to avoid sharing them with coworkers. She admits, "It's good to get negative emotions off your chest by venting to a close friend or family member, but don't complain at work at all -- people won't like you. Instead, think of ways to turn a bad situation into a more positive one and approach your boss and coworkers with solutions rather than problems."

#### **9. Handle alcohol with care.**

Sometimes bonding over food and/or drink is part of business. According to Levit, "It's OK to have fun at happy hour with your colleagues, but keep it to a one- or two-drink maximum. Don't drink at lunch or during daytime business meetings, and don't ever get drunk with coworkers even in evening, social settings. You'll end up saying or doing something you'll regret (and your coworkers may not forget)."

#### **10. Know the difference between sharing and oversharing.**

There's a fine line between a caring coworker and an overbearing one. She urges, "Develop close friendships with coworkers over a period of time, assessing how much you can trust them before you disclose too much personal information. However, do not assume someone is going to be your best friend just because you work in the same office eight hours a day; and when it doubt, you should err on the side of caution."