



Guidelines for Personal Use of Social Media

As an employee, you have some obligations to your employer that don't always end when you leave the workplace.

Here are some things to remember when you post to your favourite social media platform, even if you're in the privacy of your home, on your own time, and using your personal account:

- Don't badmouth your employer or colleagues. The B.C. Labour Relations Board recently found that the "walled garden" of Facebook is not private. Everything you post on Facebook or Twitter is considered public, even if it's just between friends, and you may be subject to discipline for comments that appear to affect your ability to do your job or that disparage your employer or a colleague. Best not even to joke about it: the Internet is the place irony goes to die.
- Avoid being Facebook "friends" with your boss. You're not friends, you're in a power relationship. It's not necessary or advisable to expose the details of your private life to your boss in real time. If using social media is important in your work team, set up a work account.
- Don't identify your employer on your personal social media account. This is another strategy to avoid blurring the line between your personal life and your work, and it gives you some protection against potential claims you are exploiting your employer for your own gain.
- You can blow the whistle on unethical behavior, but not using social media. Public criticism of your employer is risky business; you have a duty of loyalty under the law. If you have a concern about something that's going on at work, talk to a union rep about how best to resolve it. If you're bothered about the way your employer is handling something, don't vent online.
- Don't release information about your employer that isn't already public. If it's not your job to make public announcements, don't make them. You can get into trouble for revealing proprietary information.

- Your work computer is your employer's property. Don't assume that what you do on that computer (or mobile device, if it's supplied by the employer) is private, even if you're using a non-work account. It's company equipment and the company can monitor your computer use.

In the event that your Local is in bargaining, here are a few more points to consider:

- You can make comments on social media that describe what the company is doing in bargaining and that are critical of the company's position, but be careful to use common sense and good judgment.
- Ensure that what you say in a posting is true.
- A factual public statement or an opinion about collective bargaining or a collective bargaining issue will, in most circumstances, be easier to defend (unless the union and the employer have agreed to keep the subject matter confidential.)
- A factual public statement or an opinion that harms the employer's reputation and is about something that is happening in the workplace that is not being addressed in collective bargaining will be more likely to attract discipline and will be harder to defend. Bring those kinds of issues to the union for the union to deal with.
- If you identify yourself as a company employee or are identifiable as such, be clear that the opinions expressed are your own and do not represent the opinion of the employer.

If you are a union official, you have a bit more latitude. Labour legislation gives employees acting in their capacity as union officials a broad, but not unlimited, right to make public statements to promote the interests of their members.

A very respected labour arbitrator once said: if union officials "are to have the freedom to discharge their responsibilities in an adversarial collective bargaining system, they must not be muzzled into quiet complacency by the threat of discipline at the hands of their employer."

If you have any questions, contact your Local president or the Local officer designated to deal with communications.