

Just being social

Level: Pre-intermediate +

Time: 90 minutes +

Summary: This lesson is about the controversial topic of employees using social media during working hours. In this lesson, students:

1. study a text about the use of social media at work;
2. discuss their own use of social media and their reasons for using it;
3. examine their companies' policies on social-media use;
4. engage in a collaborate writing task, drawing up a set of social-media guidelines for a company or department.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students and is based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 2/2017.

Warmer

Have the students briefly discuss the questions about the private use of social media, emails and the phone during working hours and, in particular, what their company thinks about this and whether there are any guidelines in place.

Key words

Students read the definitions and scan the article to find the key words. The clues are given in the order that the words appear in the article.

Key:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Chamber of Commerce | 8. breach |
| 2. millennials | 9. alleged |
| 3. maintain | 10. defamation |
| 4. straight | 11. implications |
| 5. integrity | 12. bullying |
| 6. reassure | 13. sceptical |
| 7. works council | 14. amuse |

Understanding the article

Students work together to decide whether the statements about the article are true or false and rewrite any that are false, to make them true.

Key:

1. F – Americans spend one hour of their working day on social media or 1.8 hours if they are millennials.
2. T
3. T
4. F – 18% of employers have fired people for posting on social media (not only Facebook).
5. F – Companies should have social-media guidelines to protect employees and to reassure management.
6. F – Employees are less likely to use social media to take breaks when their company has a clear social-media policy.
7. F – Guidelines can be developed with the HR department and works council.
8. T

Phrases

This task can be done in pairs or groups of three. First, students match the phrases from paragraph 10 with the meanings.

Key: a. 1b; 2c; 3a

Then, they find and underline the phrases in the paragraph and decide whether they are more common in spoken or written English.

Key: c. They are used in spoken more than in written English. Here, we see them as part of a quote.

In pairs, the students should read the quote out loud: one student should read the quote exactly as it is written in the article. Then, the second student should read the quote without the three phrases.

Find out whether they are sensitive to how the phrases change the tone or character of the quotation. Point out that these expressions could be used in meetings and negotiations.

Key (possible answers): All the phrases makes the quote sound more fluent and natural. In a sense has a softening effect; it is tentative, allowing for possible alternative viewpoints. For that matter and in fact emphasize and strengthen the point being made.

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Gap fill

First, students use the words provided to fill the gaps in the information graphic.

Key:

1. *break*
2. *connect*
3. *strengthen/support*
4. *solve*
5. *strengthen/support*

Then, get students to talk about why they use social media at work. Do their answers correspond with those in the information graphic?

Discussion

Students discuss the questions relating to the article and the company or companies that they work for.

Writing

In pairs or small groups, students write a set of social-media guidelines for a company or department. They could do this for their company or department or for a start-up company of their choice. Alternatively, have them write social-media guidelines for your class or language school.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learnt during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

This Business Spotlight lesson asks whether networking sites should be banned from work:

www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/should-networking-sites-be-banned-from-work/550502.article

The following set of news lessons examines why there are some millennials who don't use social media:

www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/monthly-topical-news-lessons/monthly-news-lesson-the-millennials-not-using-social-media/555200.article

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1 Warmer

- Does your company have guidelines about the use of social media at work?
- Does it have any guidelines about employees contacting friends or family from work?
- Are you allowed to make and receive personal phone calls at work?
- Are you allowed to write personal emails from your work email address?

2 Key words

Match the words with the definitions. Then, find the key words in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

alleged	amuse	breach	bullying	Chamber of Commerce
defamation	implications	integrity	maintain	millennials
reassure	sceptical	straight	works council	

1. an organization of people who own shops and businesses in a particular town or city (para 3)

2. people who became adults around the year 2000 (para 3)

3. make sure that something stays at the same level, rate or standard (para 4)

4. happening for a particular period of time, without interruption (para 4)

5. the quality of always behaving according to the moral principles that you believe in so that people respect and trust you (para 4)

6. make someone feel less worried about something (para 5)

7. group within a company that represents the workers (para 6)

8. fail to do something that you have promised to do or that people expect you to do (para 7)



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9. claimed to be true, even though this has not been proved (para 7)

10. the offence of writing or saying something bad about someone that is not true and makes people have a bad opinion of them (para 7)

11. possible effects or results (para 8)

12. behaviour that frightens or hurts someone smaller or weaker (para 8)

13. having doubts about something that other people think is true or right (para 10)

14. do or say something that other people think is funny or entertaining (para 10)

3 Understanding the article

Are these statements about the article true (T) or false (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. Americans spend less than an hour of their working day on social media.

2. Many employers see the time that employees spend on social media during working hours as time theft.

3. Over a quarter of employers have fired employees for using the internet for non-work-related reasons during work hours.

4. 18% of employers have fired people for posting on Facebook.

5. Companies should have social-media guidelines to protect employers and to reassure customers.

6. Employees are more likely to use social media to take breaks when their company has a clear social-media policy.

7. Guidelines can be developed with the head of the department and the trade unions.

8. A business school professor says that many of us are working and not working at the same time when we are on social media at work.

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Just being social

by Margaret Davis



Opinions are divided about the use of social media in the workplace. It's possible that what, at first, looks like purely personal use may have a legitimate work related reason, as Margaret Davis explains.

- 1 There have been a number of developments in social media since 2002, when Heather Armstrong was fired for writing rude things about her boss on what she thought was a private blog. Even so, it's worth remembering that a) you can still lose your job for criticizing your employer or colleagues, and b) hardly anything online is actually private.
- 2 According to CareerBuilder.com, 28 per cent of employers have fired people for using the internet for non-work-related activities during working hours, while 18 per cent have fired people for something they posted on social media. It seems that not everyone takes such statistics seriously, though. A recent US study showed that 34 per cent of employees said they used social media to "take a mental break from work". And according to a study of 2,000 American office workers by the professional staffing agency Ajilon (reported in *Harvard Business Review*), 19 per cent said that they played Pokémon GO at work.
- 3 The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation says that Americans spend an average of one hour of their working day on social media. For millennials, that figure goes up to 1.8 hours. Millennials also say that having access to social media at work makes them more productive.
- 4 "To expect someone to maintain focus for eight hours straight is unreasonable. People need a break and, in today's world, that break includes

social-media access," Suzana Flores, author of *Facehooked*, told CNBC. "My advice to corporations is: don't prevent or over-moderate [social-media use at work] but you can limit it. And also, have in place policies and procedures that will protect the integrity of your company."

Does your company have social-media guidelines? It should, not only to protect employees – better to know what the company expects than to be surprised – but also because it can reassure management. According to a Pew Center study, in companies where there is a clear social-media policy, employees are actually less likely to use social media to take breaks (30 per cent, as compared to 40 per cent in companies that do not have guidelines). This is also true in the case of contacting family or friends from work: those whose companies have guidelines are only 20 per cent likely to do so, compared to 35 per cent of those whose companies do not.

Guidelines can be developed with the help of your HR department and works council. You should also ask your company to provide training on the most appropriate ways of using social media in the workplace.

There are many areas of potential conflict between social-media use and the workplace, some of which you may not have even considered. For example, employees may breach company confidentiality in private posts or may post something negative about a competitor on a company account. "An employee untruthfully tweeting on an official company Twitter account about the alleged negative treatment of women by a competitor's managing director may be faced with claims against them for defamation and their employer may face the same claims," says John Plant of the international legal firm Taylor Wessing.

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8 “Communication between employees, not only in the workplace but also through social-media sites, also has implications,” Plant adds. Some companies encourage social-media contact as team building. “But some comments which seem appropriate to one employee might be unwanted by another,” he says. Such comments could lead to claims of sexual harassment or bullying.

9 Employers also fear time theft – which is when people are paid for time when they are not actually working (for example, when they are checking private Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram accounts or personal email in the workplace).

10 Stefan Stern, visiting professor at Cass Business School, is sceptical about whether a quick visit to Facebook at work is time theft, however. “Many of us are, in a sense, working and not working at the same time, for much of the time,” Stern writes in *The Guardian*. “For example, your social-media presence may not only amuse and impress your friends but could remind a potential employer that you are available. How many of your Facebook friends are really friends, for that matter? Are they in fact contacts? Or both? There may be no simple answers to these questions.”

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4 Phrases

a. Match the phrases with their meanings.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. in a sense | a. used for emphasizing that something else is also true |
| 2. in fact | b. a way of thinking about or understanding something, although there may be other ways |
| 3. for that matter | c. used for saying what is really true, when this is surprising or different from what people think |

b. Find and underline the phrases in the final paragraph of the article.

c. Do you think they are more common in spoken or written English?

d. Read the quote out loud twice: first with the phrases, and then without them. How do the phrases change the tone or character of the quote?

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5 Gap fill

a. Complete the gaps in the information box with the words below.

strengthen support connect break solve

WHY DO PEOPLE USE SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK?

1. 34% – to take a mental _____ from work
2. 27% – to _____ with friends and family
3. 24% – to make or _____ professional connections
4. 20% – to get information that helps _____ problems at work
5. 17% – to build or _____ personal relationships with colleagues



Sources: Pew Research Center; *Harvard Business Review*

b. What about you? Why do you use social media at work?

6 Discussion

- Does your company have any social-media accounts such as Facebook or Twitter?

If so, ...

- who can post on these accounts?
- who does the company hope will read these posts?
- what types of things are posted on these accounts?
- how regularly are these accounts updated?

If not, ...

- why not?
- do you think a company should have social-media accounts?
- how might having a social-media account improve the company's image?

7 Writing

Write a set of social-media guidelines for a company or department.

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Vocabulary record: Just being social?

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
limit			
	bullying		
		productive	
			seriously

Vocabulary record

