

Sample Blog and Personal Web page Guidelines

Most people consider the internet to be an asset – it is a relatively easy source of information, a great means of communication, and, for many, a good source of entertainment and relaxation. However, it also has the possibility of harm by potentially providing predators with access to children.

(Name of Organization) has long been addressing the best ways to monitor usage of the web – how to give them access to its beneficial aspects without exposing them to its dangers.

However, there is another source of possible harm, unintentional though it may be. Comments posted to a blog (whose blog is immaterial) may give information that allows access to clients, staff, volunteers, board members and/or the public that may cast aspersions on (Name of Organization), another person or entity, or may reveal confidential, private matters. Although individuals have the right to express themselves as they deem fit, they are legally responsible for such actions. Many such users are probably unaware of the extent of their liability.

It is prudent for (Name of Organization) to inform them of that responsibility. Following is a sample policy.

Our (Name of Organization) believes in fostering a thriving online community and acknowledges blogging as a valuable component of shared media. The (Name of Organization) Personal Blog Guidelines have been developed for employees who maintain personal blogs that may contain postings about (Name of Organization)'s business, programs, fellow (Name of Organization) employees and the work they do, and content that violates the (Name of Organization) code of conduct. The guidelines outline the legal implications of blogging about (Name of Organization).

Those of you who blog should be aware that all the information you publish on a blog or public website (including personal pages on sites such as MySpace, Friendster, and to a degree Face-book) is public accessible. Posting information on these pages is conceptually similar to sending a letter to the editor in a newspaper; once published it is openly accessible (an editor can modify or not post your letter, however). You are advised to be mindful that the information you post on the internet will likely be seen by members of the (Name of Organization) community and could reflect poorly on your character. As an organization that holds personal character in the highest regard, the (Name of Organization) is obligated to take actions to preserve its core values. As such, the (Name of Organization) may terminate staff members for publishing public web pages and blogs that are contrary to the (Name of Organization)'s mission or are detrimental to its community.

LEGAL PARAMETERS – your non-disclosure obligations and legal responsibilities are listed in the following four paragraphs. Failure to abide by these guidelines can result in serious ramifications; discipline, perhaps termination of your employment at (Name of Organization), may be one of them.

1. **Legal Liability** – When you choose to go public with your opinions via a blog, you are legally responsible for your commentary. Individual bloggers can be held personally liable for any commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous (whether pertaining to the (Name of Organization), individuals, or any other entity). For these reasons, bloggers should exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations. In essence, you blog (or post on the blogs of others) at your own risk. Outside parties can pursue legal action against you for postings.

2. (Name of Organization) **Privileged Information** – Any confidential, proprietary, or trade secret information is obviously off-limits for your blog. The (Name of Organization) logo and trademarks are off-limits per our (Name of Organization) guidelines. Anything related to (Name of Organization) staff, volunteers, clients,

programs, policy, strategy, or financials, products, etc. that has not been made public cannot appear in your blog under any circumstances. Disclosing confidential or proprietary information can negatively impact our (Name of Organization) and may result in regulatory violations for the (Name of Organization).

3. (Name of Organization) Code of Conduct – All of our employees are required to sign the (Name of Organization) Code of Conduct. Blogs that violate the (Name of Organization) Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action potentially including suspension and termination of employment.

4. Press Inquiries – Blog postings may generate media coverage. If a member of the media contacts you about a (Name of Organization)-related blog posting or requests (Name of Organization) information of any kind, contact [Insert appropriate name, e-mail, and phone number]. You should also contact your Human Resources manager for clarification on whether specific information has been publicly disclosed before you blog about it.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES – A road map for constructive, respectful, and productive dialogue is suggested in the recommendations that follow. We consider these to be “best practices guidelines” that are in the spirit of the (Name of Organization) culture and the best interest of (Name of Organization) and its employees, whether they blog or not.

1. **Be Respectful of Your Colleagues** – Be thoughtful and accurate in what you post; be respectful of how others may be affected. All (Name of Organization) employees can be viewed (correctly or incorrectly) as representative of the (Name of Organization), which can add significance to your public reflections on the organization (whether or not that is your intent). If you identify yourself as a (Name of Organization) employee in your blogs and you comment on the (Name of Organization), then it would be wise to notify your supervisor – not for permission, but just to inform him/her that you have a blog where you may write about the (Name of Organization). Whether or not your supervisor chooses to occasionally read your blog, the courtesy of your alert will always be appreciated.

2. **Get Your Facts Straight** – As a (Name of Organization) employee with internet/intranet access, you have the opportunity to contact employees who are responsible for the programs, services, or other initiatives about which you may wish to write. To ensure you are not misrepresenting your fellow employees or their work, consider contacting a member of the relevant team before posting your blog. If there is someone at (Name of Organization) who knows more about the topic than you, consult with them to verify that your understandings are accurate.

3. **Provide Context to Your Argument** – Please be sure to provide enough support in your posting to help others understand your reasoning, whether it be positive or negative. We appreciate the value of multiple perspectives, so help us to understand yours by providing context to your opinion. Whether you are posting in praise or criticism of (Name of Organization), we encourage you to develop a thoughtful argument that extends well beyond “that’s really cool” or “that totally sucks”.

If you have any questions, comments or require additional discussion on this issue or our guidelines, please contact _____