

Fire Blogging and Free Speech and Living Out Loud

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Last week or abouts, Curt Varone at Fire Law Blog [answered this question](#): "Could blogging become an issue during the hiring process?" He provides a thoughtful legal perspective. Free speech is protected and the First Amendment is pretty broad in that regard. (He declines to provide a picture of said pretty broad, however. Use your imagination.) For this blogger (me, not that blogger, Curt), what's notable is what's largely unsaid.

Everything you do in the presence in others is observed by others. Your actions, your words, your behaviors over time, your character as perceived through your actions, and more. If you're a blogger or even just a regular social media user (e.g., you eat lots of fiber before getting on Facebook), then your words are having a far greater reach.

Can those words-- and the actions of being a person who "lives out loud"-- impact hiring and promotion and other aspects of your career. But of course! Getting a job, getting a promotion, etc. nearly or almost always require the decision of a human being other than yourself. And those people form their opinions and perspectives from any number of sources. That includes-- if available-- your actions through blogs and social media.

So what's a person to do, if they want to social media-ize but also be treated as fairly as possible in the workplace? As Varone notes in his posting above "The best advice is to be careful what you blog about. I am not talking about self-censorship out of fear – but rather out of thoughtfulness and respect for others. Think through what you have to say – say it in a respectful way, and you should be fine."

Be thoughtful, but perhaps don't worry. There will be those people who overreact to your thoughtful thoughts. There will be others who read them differently, or unexpectedly. There will be some who will take your nicest words and still use them in negative ways. Thus you can't really win by worrying about it. Be thoughtful, but don't obsess. Since blogs are a written media, over-thinking can curb the creative process. Your words will suffer.

Mind you, this is a pretty easy perspective for Mike Legeros. I have been "living out loud" for a couple decades now. Was a movie reviewer for an age, then wrote and posted personal essays on the Internet. I have had a personal web site forever, with bits of my life dangling online like tinsel on a drying Christmas tree. I have been blogging for several years now. I am a frequent Facebook user, though with a private profile. Heck, I even have and use a Twitter account.

I am also 46 years old, and thus far less worried about what other people think of my actions. I have also been gainfully employed for ages (outside the fire service), so I haven't been a hunter on the job market.

What works for me works for me. What the best advice for you? Be thoughtful, at least at a minimum.

Your thoughts?

Postscript #1: What lessons have I learned the hard way, by having a web site and blogging and such? Good question! Complicated answer. Let me think about that one.

Postscript #2: What about having multiple versions of yourself online, either named or anonymous? Hmmmm. Another good question.

This is good advice for the online-world, as well as IRL. Think about everything before you say, write, or do it. Be sure to consider how it could be interpreted by various people, especially online. I have a tendency to lean towards the satirical and sarcastic, but that doesn't translate well in type-form. Actually, I've found that it doesn't translate well in person from time to time, either. I've identified a whole group of my "local" colleagues who do not understand the concept of sarcasm and cannot distinguish it from sincere speech. I know that I must tone down my unique sense of humor when around them...the same goes for statements on the "interwebz".

With that said, you shouldn't censor yourself too much online. You may get hired by writing/posting/acting conservatively, but you can only keep up the charade for so long and eventually your ideas and opinions will work their way out in person, and the results will be similar. So, I would advise triple-reading your posts before posting, but continuing to be yourself. What's the point in getting hired/promoted if you have to pretend to be an entirely different person?

On the other side of things, is it remotely possible that, in some far-off land of social progression with understanding and unselfish administrators, the act of authoring well-written posts on a fire service blog could have a POSITIVE effect on your job/position? Is it possible that department leaders would commend and reward such actions by hiring/promoting? I believe so, and have experienced it in person. Unfortunately, I'm familiar with too many cases where the opposite is true, as well. My personal opinion is that many of these "crackdowns" were due to simple jealousy by the administrators.

Alas, I will "censor" myself there.

Thoughts?

-Lt. Lemon

Lt. Lemon ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 01/14/12 - 10:17

Thanks for your comments, Lemon. Humor in particular is tricky, and particularly tricky to communicate in writing. There's also the issue of respectful disagreement. Not everyone is inclined to communicate or express themselves in such open fashion. Ditto for the polite (or unpolite) disagreement for what you're expressing yourself about. But that's just another fact of life. Not everyone will like you, agree with you, or make sense of you. My take: It's better to myself, and as my myself as possible, so the universe can react accordingly. Helps those who are not fans move away, and those who are fans move closer.

Legeros - 01/14/12 - 13:27

My sentiments exactly. For me, the benefits of pretending to be what "they" want do not outweigh the loss of personality. You can't be friends with everyone. If you have to act/speak/think differently to get a job, or promotion, somewhere, would you really want to work there?

Lt. Lemon ([Email](#)) ([Web Site](#)) - 01/14/12 - 13:57

Name: (real name preferred)
E-mail: (optional)
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes
No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

[\(Register your username / Log in\)](#)

Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.