



Guidelines for Addressing Social Media and Religious Expression

Social media platforms can be great vehicles through which anyone can express their own views and build their personal brands. Your employees' personal online statements and content, however, can unfortunately conflict with your organization's own brand and stated values. As individuals and institutions alike strive to strike the right work/life balance, it is increasingly important to understand when and how to respond to perceived conflicts.

Religion is often perceived as an especially sensitive topic, even taboo, that can cause conflict in professional or even personal capacities. Organizations should be prepared to address this online intersection of the professional and personal in thoughtful and consistent manners.

Social media policies and protocols can vary greatly from one organization to the next, leaving a one-size-fits-all approach neither practical nor appropriate. With that in mind, Tanenbaum offers the following considerations for addressing employees' online statements and expressions considered religious in nature, or that are understood to be an expression of employees' beliefs.

Assessing Existing Protocols

Which organization protocols inform the personal conduct of individual employees?

What does the process of addressing employee conduct on social media look like? Who are the key stakeholders at each stage of the process? Who is ultimately responsible for addressing the matter with the employee in question? Are managers trained in your social media policies and do they know who they should refer inquiries to for a possible breach of protocol?

How could the presence of religion interrupt your organization's standard protocols?

Religion is a sensitive topic that is often avoided in workplaces rather than addressed head on. Take a moment to pause and consider whether or not the presence of religion in the post changes anything. Are there legitimate sensitivities to consider?

Do existing policies and practices help your organization navigate the situation at hand?

Do your organization's existing resources assist with addressing the issue at hand? Necessity often spurs the change required for meeting the moment. If sufficient protocols are lacking, consider how the challenge at hand can serve as a learning moment that affects positive change in organization policy. If protocols already exist, this is an opportunity to both explore how visible these policies are to employees and to consider enhancing the accessibility of the policies.

Additional Considerations

Workplace conflicts around religion and other identities may emerge—but that does not mean these identifiers are mutually exclusive or always at odds.

For example, one of the most common areas of perceived conflict is the intersection of religious and LGBTQ identity. It is both possible and common, however, for individuals to identify as religious and also as members of the LGBTQ community.

Address behavior, not belief.

Organizations should never endeavor to change employees' beliefs about religion, sexual orientation, or any other facet of identity. Workplace policies, however, can and should articulate what constitutes both acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Regarding adherence to social media policies, it's always important to give employees opportunities to explain the intention of their actions and for you to explain the impact (or potential impacts) of those actions.

For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum's online resource, [Religion at Work: A \(Human\) Resource](#). Visit the Tanenbaum [Workplace Resources](#) page for additional Tanenbaum Fact Sheets or contact Tanenbaum at workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org with questions.