

Would You Fire Someone for Blogging About Your Job Offer?

A reporter announces he's gotten his dream job on his blog only to have the company rescind the offer in response. Who's in the wrong?

Etiquette, like Jell-O, takes a while to set. Take job hunting, for example. Looking for a gig armed with your resume and best suit is a practice that had been around long enough for informal rules to solidify. Then, social media came and stirred things up. [Can employers ask potential hires for Facebook passwords?](#) How terrible an offense is it to have a profile with personal information companies might find off-putting?

But if dozens of pictures of keg stands on your account is clearly a bad idea, and password-enabled snooping by employers is pretty obviously creepy and invasive, there are still cases that are less cut and dry. Take what happened to Kristopher Brooks for example.

A young reporter just out of a New York University graduate journalism program, Brooks was thrilled to receive a job offer from the *News Journal* in Wilmington, Delaware. He responded as many young people might—he shared the good news on social media, quoting from his offer letter on his personal Tumblr blog and using the company's logo in [the post, which took the form of a press release](#).

What seems entirely innocent to the average digital native didn't sit well with the *News Journal*, however. They called Brooks to rescind the offer. "I just told my immediate editor what the post was about. And he said, 'Oh, that sounds okay.' Around a quarter to six, [local editor] Phil Freedman called me and told me [the post] was an illegal use of the company logo and I wasn't supposed to quote from the offer letter that I got...and that they wanted to rescind my job offer because of that," [Brooks told Loop21](#). He immediately offered to take down the post but the *News Journal* was unmoved. He lost the gig.

[To Brooks, and perhaps to many digital natives, the paper's move is baffling](#). "If you read the tone of my original post, I was trying to say 'I'm really excited to be here.' And from what this guy [who wrote the offer letter] has written to me, I think they're really excited to have me. So why not express this joy? I wasn't expressing it in a negative light," he said.

Others, though, have taken the side of the company. "The whole subject underscores the issue of social media promoting (or at least condoning) the notion that a person's every move is a source of endless fascination for others. Whatever happened to good old-fashioned modesty?" Dr. Sally Mounts, president of Auctus Consulting Group, [commented to Forbes](#). (Young job hunters might respond that in the current economic climate there is little room for or benefit in modesty, and self-promotion is essential.) Mounts went on to put the onus of maintaining a good relationship between a company and its new employee on the hire. "Prior to actually starting your new job, and during those critical first few weeks and months, you

are really on probation. Best behavior is a must. Tread lightly, mind your p' s and q's, and be careful," she said.

To younger ears that [may sound weird and dictatorial](#), but it's perfectly natural to older corporate citizens who take for granted a greater degree of suppression of employees' personality and autonomy in the workplace. What veterans perceive as order and loyalty, newcomers to the world of work may see as engagement and creativity-crushing control-freakishness. But whatever your initial reaction, one lesson for everyone may be to realize exactly how fluid and unsettled our expectations around social media are and how important it is when hiring to bring those assumptions out in the open.

Sharlyn Lauby, an HR pro who blogs at [HR Bartender](#), told Inc.com that while she wasn't party to all the details of the Brooks case, the general outlines that have been reported indicate an avoidable miscommunication. "This is a misunderstanding and both sides share to blame. First, the young reporter should have asked the company about how his hire would be announced. From my personal experience, some companies want to make the announcement that they've hired you. Ask first as a sign of respect for our working relationship," she said.

But she added, "on the other hand, the company didn't tell the young reporter how he would be onboarded into the organization. And appropriate hiring announcements are a part of onboarding."

So, whether your reaction is confusion at the rudeness of Brooks or surprise at the crankiness of his new employer, perhaps the underlying lesson is the same—different folks have different expectations about social media. Avoid painful miscues by communicating those expectations clearly.

Do you think the News Journal was right that this was a firing offense?