Social Media Policy

Viewers and advertisers have been critical of the posts of some highly visible employees within other media corporations. This matter forced me to reexamine the degree to which I expect employee’s communications to reflect the ideals of my corporation.

As a media corporation, my business disseminates current news and opinions to the American people. In a democracy, media corporations, such as my own, act as necessary checks on governmental powers, policies, and practices. Citizens hold the power to govern through electing and influencing officials. It is imperative to the success of our democratic society that the news citizens receive is not censored nor manipulated to promote an agenda. My media corporation recognizes this great responsibility of informing the public. My social media policies reflect the critical fact that my corporation plays a primary role in promoting democracy.

I revised my social media policies to address and thoughtfully weigh the needs of my many stakeholders: viewers, advertisers, employees, shareholders, and myself as CEO. Under my revised policy: (1) employees will not be able to engage in defamatory nor discriminatory speech, (2) employees’ private social media accounts must include a disclaimer, reminding followers that the employee does not speak on behalf of my corporation. My company will have an internal judicial board to interpret and enforce company policies.

My social media policy is derived from the Badaracco Framework found in the video.
Joseph L. Badaracco’s Defining Moments: A Framework for Moral Decisions. The Badaracco Framework contains four ethical viewpoints to consider: the “utilitarian” approach, the “individual rights” approach, the “messages sent about character” approach, and the plausibility approach (“Harvard FSS”). My media corporation is a guardian of individual rights to free speech, thus the individual rights approach is the foundation behind my social media policy. Yet, none of these approaches exist in a vacuum, and my company presumes that in the long run, if we protect individual rights we will also establish a brand of good character and benefit the greatest number of stakeholders.

I do not take limitations on employee speech lightly. Though there are few legal grounds protecting employee’s free speech against the actions of private employers, I believe our democracy functions best when citizens are allowed to engage in the public discourse. As a large media corporation with many employees, a restrictive media policy could be far reaching, barring many ideas from being heard. It is simply not plausible that my company would invest the time or money required to review the many social media accounts of all my employees.

Further, it would appear inconsistent for my company to preach the importance of free speech and my commitment to democracy, then frivolously limit my own employee engagement. Any divergence between my company values and policies could hurt my company’s reputation and credibility.

Defamatory and discriminatory speech are against the basic principles of individual rights for everyone that my company protects. I do not allow such speech at work, nor on social media. Defamation, defined by my company, is falsifying accusations to hurt a person or company’s reputation. A media corporation must earn the trust of its viewers. Employees that post unjustly
disparaging comments will lose the trust we have built with our viewers. If an employee engages in defamation, he or she has proven unfit to credibly cover news in my corporation.

Discrimination, as it applies to my social media policy, is defined as negatively stereotyping a group or a people. My company is a bastion of all individual’s rights to free speech in our democracy. I require my employees to hold the foundational belief that regardless of race, creed, gender, or sexual orientation all viewers and fellow employees deserve the same rights.

Further, discriminatory employees create a hostile work environment and will likely struggle to work cohesively within my diverse company. My corporation believes discrimination is against the most primary human laws and we will not practice nor justify it.

My corporation strives to be balanced and unbiased. Unbiased news (or as unbiased as news can be) is best for our democracy. When we can generally agree upon facts, we can grapple over merit to better decide the best course of action for the country. Our viewers, our customers, value credible news and will reward us with increased or continued viewership for maintaining an unbiased stance. With viewers tuning in, my corporation will be fiscally stable through money from advertisers thereby appeasing my shareholders and maintaining job stability for my employees.

Unfortunately, the most successful media corporations are not always the most credible; sometimes sensationalism and agenda-driven reporting is fiscally more lucrative.

Yet, I believe there is a large market of viewers that value credibility, and in the long run, maintaining my reputation as a credible and socially responsible news organization will maintain
viewership, keep advertisers interested in being associated with us, and consequently secure our financial stability for our shareholders and employees.

To establish credibility, my corporation must distinguish between the news and principles communicated by my company, and the thoughts of individual employees. Though I encourage diversity of thought amongst employees (excluding the thoughts leading to discriminatory or defamatory speech), I do not want my corporation liable for and associated with all the thoughts of my employees.

My policy requires a disclaimer on both private and public social media accounts, based on a disclaimer found in the Washington Post’s social media guidelines, stating that the posts of the employees do not speak for the corporation. Ultimately, the great clarification and protection a disclaimer provides, far outweighs the minor inconvenience it may pose to for my employees to add a disclaimer to their accounts.

Still, my corporation will make sure all employees understand and accept social media policies before and during the job.

Some employee social media issues can be anticipated and addressed, while others will surely take my corporation by surprise. Subjective definitions are a problem inherent in the concepts addressed in my policies. Discrimination and Defamation can have blurry guidelines. I will rely on a strong judicial board to justly and consistently hear emerging issues. Over time, I expect policies to adapt along with novel cases and ever-changing social media technology.

Despite the disclaimer, people are bound to get agitated over the posts of some of my employees, thereby insisting my company silence or reprimand these employees. When I neither
silence nor reprimand employees, so long as the posts are fair according to my policies, I could lose customers and advertising. In the long run, many costumers and advertisers may come back after the controversy blows over, or the employee moves on to different work. But if my company loses sight of its values by unjustly silencing an employee, there will likely be irreparable damage to my company’s credibility and brand.

Again, we believe our purpose, and our brand as a media company, is to promote democracy through credible and unbiased reporting. My company’s social media policy reflects my company’s principles.

References
