

Stone, Hartwick, and Mueller
Talent Management Associates

To: Chris Richards

From: Dana Gibson

Subject: Office gossip

Experiential Exercise

I need some advice, Chris. As you know, my department and all its employees are being transferred from Los Angeles to Dallas. We've had to keep the information "under wraps" for competitive reasons. However, one of my employees asked me point blank yesterday about a rumor she's heard that this move is in the works. I didn't answer her question directly. But I'm afraid that the office grapevine

is going to start spreading inaccurate information and then affect morale and productivity. What should I do now? Send me your written response soon (confidential, please!) about what you would do.

This fictionalized company and message were created for educational purposes only, and not meant to reflect positively or negatively on management practices by any company that may share this name.

CASE APPLICATION #1

Social Benefit or Social Disaster?

Tweets. Twittering. Prior to 2006, the only definition we would have known for these words would have involved birds and the sounds they make. Now, practically everyone knows that Twitter is also an online service—with 500 million registered users, 400 million tweets daily, and 1.6 billion daily search queries—used to trade short messages of 140 characters or less via the Web, cell phones, and other devices.⁵¹ According to its founders (Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams), Twitter is many things: a messaging service, a customer-service tool to reach customers, real-time search, and microblogging. And as the numbers show, it's become quite popular!

One place where Twitter has caught on is the sports world, especially in college sports. For instance, Les Miles, head football coach at Louisiana State University calls himself "a Twittering kind of guy." He understands the power of instant communication. Miles wants to stay ahead of the competition, especially when it comes to recruiting and keeping fans informed. He's discovered that Twittering is an easy and fun way to communicate quick tidbits of information to fans, alumni boosters, and other interested people who subscribe. And it's a convenient way for football recruiting prospects to communicate with the coaching staff. On game days, he Twitters (via a staff assistant) before games, at halftime, and after games. If

it's okay for coaches to tweet, what about the student athletes? That's often a different story.

Many universities and college coaches are monitoring and, in some cases, banning athletes' use of social media. A potentially precarious issue can arise if an athlete tweets some comment that could put the university in a negative light, offend boosters, or possibly violate an NCAA regulation. Here are a couple of tweeting slip-ups: A Western Kentucky running back was suspended after he tweeted critical comments about the team's fans; the NCAA pulled 15 football scholarships after an investigation based on a player's tweet; and a Lehigh University

wide receiver was suspended for re-tweeting a racial slur. We even saw how tweeting backfired at the London Olympics. The first "casualty"—a Greek

The Good and the Bad of TWITTER

triple jumper—was banned from the Games over some racially charged tweets. That seems to be good reason for the managers (i.e., coaches and administrators) of these programs to attempt to control the information flow. But is banning the answer? Some analysts say no. They argue that those setting up rules and regulations don't understand what social media is all about and the value it provides as a marketing and recruiting tool, and they argue that it's necessary to understand First Amendment rights (part of which includes freedom of speech). Rather than banning the use of social media, many universities are hiring

companies to monitor athletes' posts. This, however, requires athletes to give access to their accounts, which some call an invasion of privacy.

Discussion Questions

- 13-30** What are the advantages and drawbacks of universities using social media to communicate with various stakeholders—students, potential students, alumni, donors, etc.?
- 13-31** Do you think there would be more or fewer communication barriers when using social media? Discuss.

13-32 What should managers do to be sure they communicate effectively when using social media?

13-33 Looking at the rules and regulations that universities are establishing, do you think that business organizations should have rules for employees using social media? What types of rules do you think would be necessary? Be as specific as possible.

13-34 What have been your experiences—both positive and negative—with social media? From your experiences, what guidelines could you suggest for managers and organizations?

CASE APPLICATION #2

Banning E-Mail

It's estimated that the average corporate user sends and received some 112 e-mails daily. Also, some 85 percent of global Internet users check their e-mail daily.⁵² That's about 14 e-mails per hour and even if half of those don't require a lot of time and concentration, that level of e-mail volume can be stressful and lead to unproductive time. Once imagined to be a time-saver, has the inbox become a burden? Back in 2007, U.S. Cellular's executive vice president, Jay Ellison (who has since retired) implemented a ban on e-mail every Friday. In his memo announcing the change to employees, he told them to get out and meet the people they work with rather than sending an e-mail. That directive went over with a thud. One employee confronted him saying that Ellison didn't understand how much work had to get done and how much easier it was when using e-mail. Eventually, however, employees were won over. Forced to use the phone, one employee learned that a co-worker he thought was across the country, was instead, across the hall. Now, in 2012, other executives are discovering the benefits of banning e-mail.

Jessica Rovello, cofounder and president of Arkadium, which develops games, has described e-mail as "a form of business attention-deficit disorder." She found herself—and her employees—putting e-mail in the inbox ahead of everything else being worked on. What she decided to do was only check her e-mail four times a day and to turn off her

e-mail notification. Another executive, Tim Fry of Weber Shandwick, a global public relations firm, spent a year preparing to "wean" his employees off their e-mail system. His goal: dramatically reduce how much e-mail employees send and receive. His approach started with the firm's interoffice communication system, which became an internal social network, with elements of Facebook, work group collaboration software, and an employee bulletin board. And then there's Thierry Breton, head of Europe's largest IT firm, Atos. He announced a "zero e-mail policy" to be replaced with a service more like Facebook and Twitter combined.

e-mail...productive or unproductive?

Discussion Questions

- 13-35** What do you think of this? Do you agree that e-mail can be unproductive in the workplace?
- 13-36** Were you surprised at the volume of e-mail an average employee receives daily? What are the challenges of dealing with this volume of e-mail? How much e-mail would you say you receive daily? Has your volume of e-mail increased? Have you had to change your e-mail habits?
- 13-37** What do you think of the e-mail "replacement" some businesses are using—more of a social media tool? In what ways might it be better? Worse?
- 13-38** What implications can you see for managers and communication from this story?