



Chapter IV

What, Me, Worry? The Empowerment of Employees

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the training and education of business personnel about the ethics, manners and responsibilities of e-mail, voicemail, cell phones, and instant messaging, including international etiquette. The author argues for empowering employees by helping them learn to handle these electronic tools in a manner that causes the least harm to others and promotes the best records management and communication. The author outlines suggested topics and practices, and argues that companies should direct their energy into training and setting solid, understandable policy rather than relying on invasive oversight. Illegal activities, such as destroying company records, are also covered.

THE EMPOWERMENT OF EMPLOYEES

Socialization: The process whereby an individual acquires the modifications of behavior and the values necessary for the stability of the social group of which he is or becomes a member. Oxford English Dictionary

The varied uses of the Internet and all its features, the explosion in e-commerce, and the revolution in interpersonal and group communication are challenging modern business culture. Gambling, gaming and shopping have moved outside of casinos, arcades and malls and into the office place. Workers can download the latest music, zap instant messages across the country, look at lewd pictures, and play Solitaire during working hours.

Like a note passed during a meeting, e-mail is colorful, short, unedited, and usually spontaneous. When sending e-mail, most employees are not thinking about seeing their messages in a courtroom, blown up on poster board and used as evidence, nor do they want the local newspaper to quote their e-mail on the front page. The same observation can be made about voicemail. Certainly, a revealing tape can be embarrassing, as when Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina said in a voicemail to another top executive that the company might “have to do something extraordinary” to sway two large stakeholders to approve their merger with Compaq (Fried, 2002).

With these factors in mind, this chapter about the introduction of new technologies develops in three stages. First, the focus is on the main theme, educating workers to use the artifacts in a constructive manner, because acculturation and training are the preferred way to create honest, loyal employees. Then the chapter shifts to “acceptable use” policies, and how they might help. Third, the focus turns to legal and illegal activities that might occur.

This chapter contains suggestions for empowering workers, helping people to be well-trained and responsible users of the new tools. The technology demands adaptation and consideration on all sides, and business is currently in a transition phase. If a company cannot train its employees, or prefers a top-down, Big Brother approach, will that make workers perform better? How will employees handle the lack of privacy that comes with computer infiltration of all parts of their working lives?

THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

Historically, developing “acceptable” or “understood” ethical practice lags well behind new introduction of new tools. Owners of automobiles, for example, still receive only rare punishment for unsafe or antisocial behavior. Some areas do a better job than others of instilling responsible car use; driving habits around Boston would bring approbation in rural California. The two words, “cellular

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