



From gossip to attitude, mistakes can hurt careers

By: The Associated Press
Appeared on March 9, 2010

DENVER - Sometimes, it's the little things that can trip up a career.

How well you work is always key to your success. But you can hurt yourself with an offhand comment to a colleague in a break room, a tendency to criticize new policies or relying too much on e-mail to communicate with co-workers and clients.

Here are some of the biggest mistakes you can make on the job, and tips about how to avoid them:

MISSING THE BIG COMPANY PICTURE?

Your job is about helping the company succeed. Your personal needs are important, but not necessarily to your bosses. So you need to look at your work from the company's point of view. Start by reviewing your job description and performance evaluations. See if you have reached the goals managers set for you. Talk with your bosses about their expectations, says New York career consultant Kimberly Bishop. Look for opportunities to help the company, and in turn, your chances to advance.

"If you're ever asked to take on different projects, get involved in a task force or something for a new initiative, absolutely try to do that," Bishop said. "That just shows you're helping the company achieve its results."

If you ask for a raise, keep in mind the company's needs, not just your own, suggests David Lewis, founder of career consulting agency Operations Inc. in Stamford, Conn.

Don't base your request on personal needs, such as money to pay for a child's education. And your boss doesn't want to hear you ask for a raise because your co-worker earns more than you do. Think about how the economy has affected your company, and in turn, your job. If your business cut staff last year, you probably took on additional responsibilities. Make a case for a raise based on the work you did: taking on extra assignments, staying late and giving clients or customers a high level of service. Emphasize your dedication and commitment.

THE ART OF MISCOMMUNICATION

If you communicate with your bosses, co-workers and clients primarily through e-mail or instant messaging, you may be missing an opportunity to develop a rapport with them and enhance your career.

Instead, set aside time for face-to-face conversations even if they're just about minor issues.

Ian Alexander, co-founder of a content development company called Eat Media, said he realized he spent too much time last year developing business through his blog and Twitter accounts. He skipped some industry conferences and other gatherings where he could have forged some relationships.

"I think I did a lot more, you know, digital handshaking. I should have done a lot more face-to-face handshaking," he said. Alexander is taking steps to correct that this year. He is speaking at more industry conferences and looking for opportunities to get out of the office to meet with clients.

MOPE, GOSSIP, GRIPE — MISTAKE!

You can hurt your career if you complain about bosses, hours, salaries or other work-related issues on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Or in the elevator or break room.

Another misstep is to challenge supervisors during office meetings, which not only puts managers and the company on the spot but broadcasts your anger to your co-workers, Lewis says. A better approach is to speak privately with your supervisor or human resources manager about issues that affect your ability to do your job. You are more likely get the response you seek and maintain your reputation as a career professional, Lewis said. Of course, it's fairly easy to start gossiping. Politely refuse to participate when co-workers start such conversations. Best of all, don't start one yourself.

PROTOCOL PITFALLS

If you don't know how to navigate the inner workings of your organization, you could hurt your chances for advancement. Know the protocol and follow the chain of command, Lewis says. For example, you have a great idea for improving business. You pitch it to your supervisor, but he or she isn't interested. So you decide to suggest it to your supervisor's boss. But by going to a higher-up, you could end up being seen as disloyal, not playing by the rules and trying to undermine your immediate supervisor, Lewis said.

If you do decide to pitch your idea to your boss' manager, emphasize that you are doing so because you believe it will help the company. And say that you don't want your actions to have a negative impact on your career, Lewis said.

MAKE SURE YOU'RE REALLY WORKING WHEN YOU'RE AT WORK

With such busy jobs and immediate access to the Internet, it can be easy to fall into the practice of handling personal business at work, particularly during lulls in a busy day.

But at many companies, there's no such thing as recess. Before you shop online or answer personal e-mails or phone calls, make sure you know what your company's policies are and stay within the guidelines.

"Nothing else matters if you're not delivering what you're supposed to for your position," Bishop says.