SHADES OF GREY IN HUMAN RESOURCES

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The workplace is becoming even more dynamic in relation to technology and some managers must realize that it is not business as usual. However, the use of technology in the workplace has presented both opportunities and challenges. For a manager, trying to ensure the appropriate use of technology can prove difficult, especially since some issues are neither black nor white.

Every manager now has to ask himself at which point does someone's personal life become a company issue. Social media is now a part of everyday life and Facebook and Twitter are two out of an endless number of online communities. While an organization can use social networks to offer a forum for clients or to advertise for little or no cost, on the other hand an employee may use the online community to keep in touch with friends abroad. Here is where black and white becomes grey. It can be argued that if it is done during working hours, then it is an improper use of company time but then, so too is taking five minutes to listen to the news. This issue is relatively new to Barbados but already we have received queries on these issues from our members. The reality is that many organizations are not prepared to deal with the use of technology in the workplace because they don't have the necessary policies in place. In this article some of the polices which may be implemented will be discussed. Of course all may not apply to your environment at the moment, but then again who would have expected that blogging could be an issue for the workplace.

Below are three existing and emerging trends which could be addressed through policy:

- **Personal website and web logs (blogs).**

   In this policy it should be made clear that it is the right of the employee to engage in blogging or using their personal websites or other such activities on their own time. On the other hand disclosure of confidential, proprietary or third party information that is only known to the company regardless of when it was done, could result in action by the company including discipline. Likewise employees should be made aware that defamatory statements about the company, clients, partners or affiliates or even competitors should be avoided. In a case where the employee identifies themself as an employee of the company, they should also be certain to make sure that they inform others that their views are not that of the company.

- **Personal and company cell phones, MP3/MP4 players, ipods, Recording devices and other personal media players.**

   Personal media players have taken so many different forms that it is difficult to determine what to address in some policies. Policies should be designed to address electronic devices which are

personal or issued by the company. The policy must address the conditions which allow for usage at work.

- **Internet usage, Emailing and Information ownership.**

    Policies which cover these topics should make it clear that the computers systems provided are for the sole purpose of carrying out the business of the company and that misuse would not be tolerated. Information contained on the system always remains the property of the company and the company reserves the right to monitor traffic or emails or any other activity at any time. Guidelines must be set to inform employees on how to use their internet access provided for business use or personal use (if permitted). Issues such as downloading software, electronic document retention and internal emails should also be addressed.

At present many companies have asked the BEC to create or review their handbooks as they recognise the need to address old, new and emerging HR issues. While the implementation of policies is important, there are other considerations.

First of all the organizational culture and the nature of the business must dictate the types of policies to be implemented as well as the type of language to be used when developing the policy. For instance implementing an internet policy may be critical to maintaining the security of electronic records in the informatics sector while on the other hand this may not be a critical issue in the manufacturing sector.

Secondly there must be some form of disciplinary action for persons who violate these policies. This means that the codes of discipline and/or conduct will need to be updated to reflect the changes in the company's procedural framework.

In addition, if you as the manager decide to implement any policies, you should also be prepared to adhere to them and ensure consistent enforcement. You must also ensure that your sanctions are fair and that positive discipline is always the approach that is taken.