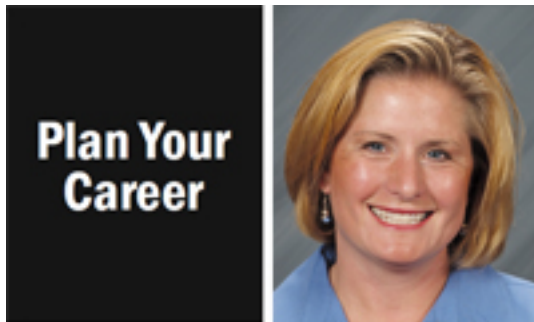


Social Media: Not that kind of leader?

Written by Julie Desmond

Wednesday, 24 November 2010 20:05



By Julie Desmond
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“I’m not that kind of guy.” The terrified smile suggested this man of influence and considerable decision making authority had considered the question, decided against it, and would not, for any reason, be persuaded to change his behavior. The firm stance would have been perfectly appropriate if the individual were facing any of the inappropriate proposals businesspeople are often handed. This time, however, the question was, “How does your company employ social media?”

Technology is moving so fast that it can seem like one of those sound barriers along the freeway. It divides. And those who suddenly realize they are on the wrong side of the barrier are slow to move forward and are hard-pressed to find a way over or around the wall.

The book *Here Comes Everybody*, by Clay Shirky, paints a clear and fascinating picture of the fundamental shift in American behavior that allows a company to capitalize on the interactive magic of the www. Collaboration online, through Flickr, Meetup, Facebook and more, can happen spontaneously and efficiently among people who might never have met, but who share a common interest or expertise.

Social media functions flexibly and effectively (how many human employees do that?) by putting communication into the hands of ordinary people. A hotel guest might comment online that their stay was average: the sheets were crisp and clean, but the complimentary breakfast was toxic. Aware that consumer opinions are more reliable than any marketing brochure a hotel chain creates on its own, the owners might choose to do some reputation management online themselves, correcting the problem and mitigating the consumer’s complaint before that cold cup of coffee spills out across the company’s next financial statement.

Leaping over the social media sound wall is possible and critical to tomorrow’s businesspeople. A jumping off point is Shirky’s book and others which are straightforward and persuasive as well as instructive. Beyond books, social media by nature is so public that it is accessible even to the least savvy of leaders.

An online education is as close as the www. Reading about social media and seeing how others are using it should give a traditional person some solid ideas about its benefits and how-to’s. By investing some time and curiosity, a good leader can overcome the social media divide and proudly and prosperously become “that kind of guy.”

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