

Do You Share Too Much on Social Media?

How much information is TMI?

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When I worked in the corporate world, I built a strong and impenetrable stone firewall between my work life and my personal/home life. I rarely talked about my family facts or leisure interests. I was once scolded by a business coach for being “all work and no play,” but I had been taught in my previous jobs in financial services that sharing too much personal information was risky and inappropriate.

We now work in a different era. Casual work environments, the emphasis on work/life balance, and the boom in social media communications have all prompted me to cautiously cross that (blurry) line between personal and professional. A colleague recently suggested that I remove my Foursquare and Twitter updates from my LinkedIn profile because they were overshadowing my business accomplishments. I found that advice ironic, in light of the previous feedback, but he had raised a good point. I changed my auto-feed settings the next day.

How much “personal stuff” should remain private? Here’s my perspective:

- If you are in a service business, consider the fact that your clients may read your posts. Even if you take a “working vacation,” time on the beach can be mistaken for goofing off. Organize your contacts and share only personal details with friends and family. Or, resist the urge to post about that midday Mai Tai at the pool bar.
- A fine line exists between pride and narcissism. Make sure that 80 percent of your public content is helpful, educational, and collaborative. Ask questions and share others’ great news and insights.
- Learn how to use privacy settings and Google+ circles and refrain from public posts that reveal too much skin and intimate life details.
- Don’t whine perpetually about business and life problems. Who wants to become depressed or frightened whenever they look at your profile?
- Guard your “A” list contacts. Some folks are prone to pirating your inner circle without permission.
- Move one-to-one communications off your wall on Facebook. If you want to have a direct conversation, message someone or simply call her on the old fashioned phone.

Personal details can humanize you as a professional. Your interest in sports, knitting, origami, your antique teacup collection, or anything else can be great conversation fodder with clients, colleagues, and coworkers. But continuous personal chitchat can also become boring or create a negative brand impression.

Be real, be you, but be discrete. Your personality and interests should shine through, but as I’ve discovered, friends and followers may draw the wrong conclusions from TMI.

My stone firewall has now transformed into a gauze curtain—and sometimes a light-blocking window shade. We’re all still learning the new definition of public and private. How you adjust the controls depends on your own comfort level.

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