Firms shouldn’t base hiring on social media behaviour

IN SUMMARY

- Study shows that there is no relationship between one’s conduct on the platforms and success at work.

Akinyi studied at a top Nairobi university. Throughout her three years of university she participated in her campus’ Business Association Club, Travel Society, and Entrepreneurship Club. She held leadership positions in the clubs and also maintained an active social life.

By the time her graduation rolled around, Akinyi possessed a stellar CV that could normally assure a posh entry-level job in her desired NGO field. Following the advice of her lecturers, she started sending out resumes to desirable organisations throughout East Africa.

She scored four interviews with international and local NGOs. During the interviews, Akinyi answered all the questions and felt that she interacted well with the interviewers.

However, once graduation occurred three months later, still no NGO had contacted her following the interviews.

Eventually after leaving university, Akinyi found employment with a small community-based organisation (CBO) in Lodwar. Years passed and she gradually worked her way up to lead the CBO.

In her executive role, she attended a donor conference in Nairobi. While there she ran into two human resources managers at two NGOs which never called her back following her initial interviews while she was still at university.

Following awkward greetings, the trio struck up a conversation in the hotel bar at the end of the first day of the conference.

She looked them both straight in the eyes and asked them why they never called her back following her interviews. Their sincere responses shocked Akinyi.

The two confirmed that she did indeed do very well in the interviews. However, both their organisations maintained stringent “social media reference checks” prior to hiring new staff.

The managers confessed that they both thought Akinyi displayed “party obsessed” and “party animal” behaviour on her Facebook and Instagram accounts because of her numerous pictures at social gatherings with other students. Inasmuch, they each felt that she might not take a serious NGO job earnestly.
Bewildered, Akinyi thanked them for their honesty and then proceeded to tell them about the good work she and her CBO did in communities across northern Kenya.

Ironically, the same extroversion that drove Akinyi to spend time with friends during her university years later served her well in the CBO and enabled her to gain the trust of local communities even as an outsider.

In today’s digital world flush with social media penetrating every aspect of our lives, we repeatedly hear the foreboding warnings about what not to post on social media.

While secondary schools and universities frequently warn their students about the future negative consequences of posting drinking, relational, or revealing pictures and comments onto social media, today’s youth still flood to websites and mobile apps to share their life experiences, both positive and negative.

The public sharing culture marks a stark societal change from the stoic reserved generations of Kenya’s past.

Commensurate with the upsides of deeper social bonding within a peer group that today’s youth experience online, one of the numerous downsides of social media usage includes the scrutiny that future employers will judge new recruits’ Internet footprint.

Human resources officers often receive training in how to judge a candidate’s job-fit by analysing the prospective employee’s online public accounts.

Additionally, many firms also hire outside specialist firms to drudge through online records and provide a professional opinion back to the employer about whether or not to hire the individual.

Gender and ethnicity

Today’s Business Talk column does not seek to provide yet another ominous menacing reminder to today’s youth, but instead points out that managers’ social media bias is dead wrong.

Stunning new research published this month in the prestigious Journal of Management by social scientists Chad Van Iddekinge, Stephen Lanivich, Philip Roth, and Elliott Junco show how screening candidates based on online footprints leads to worse results to the hiring firm.

The quartet performed a fascinating longitudinal study whereby they showed many youth social media profiles to human resources managers, recruiters, and specialists firms.

The hiring professionals then rated each youth profile on their suitability for employment in top firms using their own standard social media reference check methodology.

The researchers later followed up with each of the youth after they entered the full-time workforce and garnished performance reviews from their supervisors.

Surprisingly, the researchers found that no significant statistical relationship existed at all between a human resources recruiter or specialist firm’s social media evaluation of a candidate and that same candidate’s future success in the workplace.

An employee’s job performance, intention to quit and actual turnover did not relate at all to the earlier Facebook profile-based assessment predictions.

The research also found that hiring professionals biased their social media assessments to favour those from the same gender and ethnic background as themselves.

Additional research conducted by this author in Eastern and Southern Africa to be released in 2017 also shows that personal life events and satisfaction do not moderate, or in other words do not impact, an employee’s workplace behaviour.

In short, managers throughout Kenya, please learn from the above example that your employees’ personal social lives, whether reflected online or not, play no part in their career success.

So stop being so rigid with new recruits and your own staff over promotions. Give everyone a chance and focus on workplace task competence and attitude fit rather than personal life alignment. You will reap better rewards for your firm in the long run.

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