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Facebook Firings

In the era of social media more people are sharing things about themselves online more than ever, so it is no surprise some people may put inappropriate things on their pages. Social media and Facebook in particular have become a centerpiece in millennial culture. In this day and age employers have begun searching for employee’s Facebook profiles as a background check of sorts. Employers should be able to fire or not hire someone due to their online presence because of possible reflections upon the company.

Those against firing for online activity argue that personal rights and freedom of speech trump a company’s image. They believe that firing for online activity such as inappropriate jokes on Facebook is infringing upon one’s constitutional right to freedom of speech and as such cannot be punished for. Furthermore, one could argue that an employee is not property of a company and that what happens outside of the workplace should have no bearing on employment. Another argument is that anything posting on a person’s Facebook is a reflection of themselves and penalizing free speech online could lead to dangerous areas, such as being fired for private opinions not expressed in the workplace.

There are also those that argue for the firings, saying that if one does not want a post to be public and in the open, they can adjust the privacy setting so that the post is not able to be seen by the entire world. These people also would argue that companies absolutely have a right to see what their employees are saying online in a public format, citing possible damage to company image. Having racist or sexist employees and not firing them for said views could be seen as being complicit and would be a “PR nightmare”. One must also take into account the fact that when employed by a company, one is essentially carrying a brand with them and is a reflection of the company itself, and the employee is expected to act in a professional manner.

The crux of the argument lies in the freedom of speech, with one side saying that all speech is protected and should not be silenced, while the other is saying one should be held accountable for their actions. The problem with the freedom of speech argument is that the first amendment only protects a person’s right to free speech from government censorship, a company is a private entity and does not have to abide by this policy. Another problem with the freedom of speech argument is that while freedom of speech is protected, one is not free from repercussions as a result of said speech. The argument that having repercussions for things said online may lead to Orwellian consequences is a slippery slope fallacy, and has no basis in reality. Arguing that a person is not an extension of the company is odd, because if one is being paid by the company, by definition one is an extension of it. The freedom of speech is protected, just like the company’s freedom to terminate whomever they please, at any time.

The debate on this topic has become heated over the past few years, only increasing in ferocity as more stories of these firings surface. Wherever there is perceived “injustice”, there will always be internet outrage. But at the end of the day, a company has a right to be able to fire whomever they please, even if it is over a Facebook post.