**Confidentiality – A Vital Workplace Ethic**

# **ABSTRACT**

*“Confidentiality is a delicate bargain of trust.”*

*― Martin Uzochukwu Ugwu*

In today’s increasingly litigious and highly competitive workplace, **confidentiality ethics** is important for a host of reasons. Failure to properly secure and protect confidential business information can lead to the loss of business/clients.

This article focuses on defining confidentiality, highlighting the importance of establishing confidentiality codes and critiques the possibilities of encountering the same. It also discusses the ways that project managers, for their teams can emphasize the importance of confidentiality and implement codes of ethical behavior that provide clearly articulated guidelines outlining acceptable and expected action.

## What is Workplace Confidentiality?

The commitment to keep personal information private; to protect the information from being disclosed to others without individual’s consent. Confidential workplace information can be broken down into 3 categories: employee, management, and business information.

Employee Information: Many states have laws which govern the confidentiality and disposal of “personal identifying information” (e.g., an employee’s SSN, home address, [employee medical disabilities](https://adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview) (ADA) etc.).

Management Information: Confidential management information includes discussions about employee relations issues, disciplinary actions, impending layoffs/reductions-in-force, terminations, etc.

Business Information: This is often referred to as confidential business information as “proprietary information” or “strategy secrets.” This refers to information that’s not generally known to the public and would not ordinarily be available to competitors except via illegal means

## Why is Confidentiality such an important aspect in the world of project management & organizational behavior?

**Confidentiality** is fundamentally both a compliance/ legal matter and is a serious risk management issue as well.

The following are few of the major known impacts:

1. Client / Stakeholder information breach will lead to –
   1. Lack of confidence not only from your existing clients, but from prospective ones too
   2. Negative media attention to the company
2. Financial Implications – As a business, a breach of confidentiality could result in sizeable compensation pay-outs or legal action, depending on the scale of the breach
3. In case of individual privacy breach – Will adversely impact on the mental, physical, economic or social well-being of the individual to whom the information relates.

## Some of the current challenges faced in the projects maintaining Confidentiality

Daily, in projects we are dealing with client and company sensitive information.

Some of the actions of the employees which pose a threat to the confidentiality ethics –

1. Client information written on boards, printed out in the form of documents
2. Employees discussing confidential information in public places / social media
3. Client machines used for personal access (social media, personal mail accounts etc.)
4. Disposal of resources (laptop, desktop, files etc.) without erased data

What’s needed is an environment where protecting employees’ and clients’ privacy is top of mind for every new project or program.

## What Steps Can Be Taken To Better accentuate and implement codes to maintain [discipline around Confidentiality at workplace](https://workspirited.com/confidentiality-in-workplace)?

As a project manager, your role would be to implement and broadcast the governing parameters in line with rest of the project activities.

1. Ensure that employees are aware of the confidentiality policies and procedures. A [confidentiality policy](https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/how-employers-can-protect-confidential-information/) should also describe the level of privacy employees can expect relating to their own personal property
2. Ensure all confidential documents are stored in locked file cabinets or rooms accessible only to those who have a business “need-to-know
3. Impose strict desk guideline of clearing any confidential information before going home at the end of the day
4. Ensure right IT privacy standards - All electronic confidential information should be protected via firewalls, encryption and passwords
5. Strict policies on the usage of e-mail to transmit certain sensitive or controversial information
6. [Disposing of confidential information / Staff Training](http://t.co/P60sSMYff2): Before disposing of an old computer, use software programs to wipe out the data contained on the computer or have the hard drive destroyed
7. Employees to be made aware of refraining from discussions on [confidential information in public places](https://beyondthereceptiondesk.wordpress.com/2018/01/22/when-you-overhear-a-breach-of-confidentiality-bank-personalinformation-uneasy/) or social media
8. Track the acquisition of confidential client data unless it is integral to the project transaction
9. Train management and employees: Oftentimes, simply having a written confidentiality policy is not enough. For the confidentiality policy to be effective, managers, supervisors and employees must be educated on confidentiality issues and the company’s policies and procedures. Management and employees should be allowed an opportunity to ask questions about the policies, and everyone should be trained to avoid putting sensitive information in e-mails.

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