



**ROPELLA**  
GROWING GREAT COMPANIES

# EXECUTIVE ADVICE ON HOW TO **AVOID SLANDER** AND RESIST MUCKRAKING

*The Internet makes this a small world; your words live there forever.*



## EXECUTIVE ADVICE ON HOW TO AVOID SLANDER **AND RESIST MUCKRAKING**

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For some people, one of the hardest things to learn is when to talk and when stay silent.

Learning this lesson can be costly and painful, but eventually it must be learned. Then the individual will wonder why it wasn't learned sooner — and he could have avoided the pain it caused him and others.

Learn this lesson now, lest you make a mistake with recruiters as you try to advance in your career.



## **DON'T BADMOUTH YOUR EMPLOYER**

Michael Hyatt gave an example of this at Intentional Leadership when he spoke about how Gen. Stanley McChrystal derailed his own career. Gen. McChrystal had publicly spoken negatively about his boss – President Obama – in several interviews with “Rolling Stone” magazine.

The general was soon called back from his post as head of US forces in Afghanistan – the very position President Obama had recently appointed him to – and he was promptly fired.

All of this, of course, was splashed all over the media for months, and is now permanently recorded on the internet to follow McChrystal for the rest of his life.

This is a very valuable lesson to learn as early in your career as possible. Because other people have easy access to the Internet, anything you say – publicly or privately – can easily and instantly be posted online. It can get you fired – before you’ve even realized what happened – or why, or how.

And it also can keep you from advancing to new jobs; executives, recruiters and headhunters are leery of troublesome talkers.

## **EMPLOYERS READ SOCIAL MEDIA, TOO**

The internet gives virtually every person a voice or a platform – something most never had before.

Now anyone can utter all kinds of blather for the entire world to read or hear online. They can do it openly or anonymously, whether their statements are true or not.

So be careful with whom you share your thoughts; you may be surprised how you get quoted and misquoted. Accuracy may not matter; the damage is already done.

Bosses naturally check social media to see what employees are saying about the company and about themselves. They check Facebook and blog postings by their employees and by potential hires.

These checks include Google searches of your name, text messages, company emails, and comments made on Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media. Special corporate software can even automate the process of looking for any negative information on a company. The software looks for the company’s name or its leaders’ names wherever they’re being written about on the Internet.





## **YOU NEVER KNOW WHO WILL HEAR YOU OR READ YOUR WORDS**

Sometimes, you may be talking to a total stranger and inadvertently say something off the cuff. Be extremely careful; this stranger may be the boss's friend, cousin or sister, etc. Word can get back to them, and you won't be able to undo your slip of the tongue.

I learned this lesson personally at a very early point in my career.

I was swimming in the pool at a health club when a friend asked where I worked and who my boss was.

Fortunately, I mentioned the company and my boss's name in a positive light and told the friend why I liked both.

That afternoon I was walking past my boss's office and he called me in. "So I hear you were yapping about me at the health club today," he told me. "That old guy sitting on the bench a few feet in front of you was my dad. He says you seem like a real good guy."

Wow, was I freaked! Happy, too, that I wasn't complaining.

## **YOUR WORDS AFFECT YOUR IMAGE**

"Personal attacks make you look petty and weak, and this could be a very real reason for you to be passed over for a position," said Bruce Weinstein at BusinessWeek. "Also bear in mind that professional circles can be small and tightly knit; it's entirely possible your interviewer knows your previous boss or colleagues. You don't want to acquire a reputation for being petty, vindictive, or tactless."

My grandmother often said, "If you can't say something nice - you're better off not saying anything at all."

Another bit of wise advice from this 99-year-old woman: "If you throw mud, you're just losing ground."

It's similar to the Navy's longstanding motto, "Loose lips sink ships." Loose lips can also sink interviews, jobs and careers, as experienced recruiters can attest.

At a job interview, simply zip your lip about your boss and coworkers. You may even be goaded or flat out asked to discuss tell your boss's management style or what you liked and disliked. This is a sure warning sign to zip your lip and not reveal any complaints you have about your current or past bosses.

If you say something negative about your boss, HR managers and interviewers assume that you'll say something negative about a new boss, too.

Critical people tend to remain critical; recruiters quickly eliminate negative people during interviews.

So, you're better off saying something nice and leaving it at that. With practice and deep study, you can find something nice to say about almost anyone.

Also, remember that most people believe that every story has more than one side. Apart from hearing yours, a hiring manager is bound to wonder what the other half of the story might be. Or, the interviewer may wonder if it is ever possible to please you. It is considered good business practice to never complain, even if asked to do so.

When a complaint is necessary, always make it only to those who can do something about it, and only after you have carefully considered whether it's worth it to complain. Pick your fights wisely.

Usually, it's better to seek solutions than to make complaints. At least try to offer solutions before you file your complaint.

## **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE YOURSELF**

Instead of lodging complaints, turn the interview to your advantage.

Talk about your career objectives and your strengths and experiences. You might say something about the fact that you want a greater challenge for your talents than what the last company offered, or you're seeking greater responsibilities, or your previous employer laid off a number of employees after restructuring the company, etc.

Here's another way to answer that pesky question "Why did you leave your last job?" Focus on what you learned from the experience at the last company. Be sure to make it positive and end by mentioning a talent that is in demand at the company that is interviewing you.

Stay positive — and hope that people know that your previous boss really was a jerk.

Badmouthing the former boss is bad business even if the interviewer knows you are telling the truth.

By being diplomatic and not mentioning it at all, you will impress the interviewer as someone who has credibility, discretion and integrity, all highly desired traits.

Badmouthing a previous boss is a sure-fire way to burn your bridges, too. You may need a reference from that boss; you can't expect something favorable from him if you were caught complaining — especially if you did it in writing on the Internet.

I've found that time can heal most wounds caused by verbal disagreements. But written complaints cause deeper wounds, especially if you're caught complaining -- or worse, libeling a person or company in writing.

Thanks to the internet, these comments can follow you forever. In the worst case scenario, you get fired and/or sued thanks to your big mouth, and it is unlikely that you will easily get a new job.

Records of lawsuits are easy to find online; any company doing basic background checks will find them.

So now you know; you've been warned and you've been schooled... It's simply a very bad career move to criticize a boss, other employees or a company for that matter. Doing so online is apt to get you fired - possibly even immediately.

Remember, too, that what goes online tends to stay online for a very long time. Potential future employers can see what you've said about others; it's likely to cost you a job you really want now or in the future.



## ABOUT ROPELLA

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*As the world's leading Executive Search Firm specializing in the chemical, consumer products and technology industries, we understand the challenges you face in trying to find the perfect fit for those highly specialized and complex executive positions.*

*Ropella excels at finding those select few executive candidates with the right skills, qualifications, background and management style, who fit your compensation parameters and are ready to relocate.*

*We believe nobody should have to waste time screening resumes of candidates who aren't qualified, don't fit your compensation parameters, aren't serious about the role or aren't ready to relocate. That's why we developed the SMART Search System® to provide our clients with precise and predictable hiring results, giving them a huge competitive advantage.*