

# Case Incident 1

Dianna Abdala

To illustrate how precious e-mail is, consider the case of Dianna Abdala. In 2005, Abdala was a recent graduate of Suffolk University's law school, and she passed the bar exam. She then interviewed with and was offered a job at a law firm started by William Korman, a former state prosecutor.

The following is a summary of their e-mail communications.

Original Message

From: Dianna Abdala

Sent: Friday, February 03, 2006 9:23 p.m.

To: William A. Korman

Subject: Thank you

Dear Attorney Korman,

At this time, I am writing to inform you that I will not be accepting your offer. After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that the pay you are offering would neither fulfill me nor support the lifestyle I am living in light of the work I would be doing for you. I have decided instead to work for myself, and reap 100% of the benefits that I sew [sic].

Thank you for the interviews.

Dianna L. Abdala, Esq.

Original Message-----

From: William A. Korman

To: Dianna Abdala

Sent: Monday, February 06, 2006 12:15 p.m.

Subject: RE: Thank you

Dianna

Given that you had two interviews, were offered and accepted the job (indeed, you had a definite start date), I am surprised that you chose an e-mail and a 9:30 p.m. voicemail message to convey this information to me. It smacks of immaturity and is quite unprofessional. Indeed, I did rely upon your acceptance by ordering stationary [sic] and business cards with your name, reformatting a computer and setting up both internal and external e-mails for you here at the office. While I do not quarrel with your reasoning, I am extremely disappointed in the way this played out. I sincerely wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

Will Korman

-----Original Message-----

From: Dianna Abdala  
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2006 4:01 p.m.  
To: William A. Korman  
Subject: Re: Thank you

A real lawyer would have put the contract into writing and not exercised any such reliance until he did so.

Again, thank you.

Original Message

From: William A. Korman  
To: Dianna Abdala  
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2006 4:18 p.m.  
Subject: RE: Thank you

Thank you for the refresher course on contracts. This is not a bar exam question. You need to realize that this is a very small legal community, especially the criminal defense bar. Do you really want to start pissing off more experienced lawyers at this early stage of your career?

Original Message

From: Dianna Abdala  
To: William A. Korman  
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2006 4:28 p.m.  
Subject: Re: Thank you

bla bla bla

After this e-mail exchange, Korman forwarded the correspondence to several colleagues, and it quickly spread exponentially.

### Questions

1. With whom do you side here—Abdala or Korman?

**Answer:** At some point, they were both a bit unprofessional and immature.

2. What mistakes do you think each party made?

**Answer:** Initially, the communication should have been perhaps more formal and less sarcastic. Will Korman could also just have graciously accepted her response instead of fueling the e-mail battle.

3. Do you think this exchange will damage Abdala's career? Korman's firm?

**Answer:** It could damage her career since she was new and just starting to build relationships and a career. In a small town and in the legal community, he could seriously impair her opportunities. His firm is established and he is already an experienced lawyer.

4. What does this exchange tell you about the limitations of e-mail?

**Answer:** These e-mails had emotions attached and communicated some negative messages. E-mails are also not confidential and can be shared and/or forwarded to anyone. This exchange was particularly imprudent for Ms. Abdala.

Sources: "Dianna Abdala," *Wikipedia* (<URL>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dianna\\_Abdala](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dianna_Abdala)</URL>); and J. Sandberg, "Infamous Email Writers Aren't Always Killing Their Careers After All," *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2006, p. B1.</SRC>

## Case Incident 2

### Should Companies that Fire Shoot First?

In the recessions in the early eighties and nineties and after the 2001 terrorist attacks, layoffs were fairly private affairs. To be sure, news would often leak out to local and national media outlets, but companies did their best to keep it as quiet as possible. One consequence of the growth of the Internet in general, and of social networking sites in particular, is that this is no longer possible.

When Starbucks laid off employees in 2008 and 2009, the Web site StarbucksGossip.com received a barrage of posts from disgruntled employees. One 10-year employee wrote, “This company is going to lose every great partner that it has. I am sick and tired of being blamed for not meeting my budget when the economy is in a recession. I used to be proud of my company . . . now I am embarrassed and feel physically ill every time I have to go to work.”

Some companies are taking a more proactive approach. When Tesla Motors laid off employees, its CEO, Elon Musk, posted a blog entry on the topic just before announcing the layoffs to employees. “We had to say something to prevent articles being written that were not accurate,” he said.

“Today, whatever you say inside a company will end up in a blog,” says Rusy Rueff, a former executive at Pepsico. “So, you have a choice as a company—you can either be proactive and say, ‘Here’s what’s going on,’ or you can allow someone else to write the story for you.”

Illustrating the perils of *ignoring* the blogosphere, when newspaper giant Gannett announced it was laying off 10 percent of its employees, it posted no blog entries and made no statement. Jim Hopkins, a 20-year veteran who left the company just before the layoffs, writes the unofficial Gannett Blog. “I try to give the unvarnished truth. I don’t think the company offers the same level of candor to employees,” he said. Gannett spokeswoman Tara Connell replied, “We attempt to make those personal communications happen as quickly as possible.”

Says blog expert Andy Sernovitz, “There are hold-out companies that still wish there was traditional P.R. control of the message, but that day is long over.”

#### Questions

1. Do you think Tesla CEO Elon Musk did the right thing when he blogged about impending layoffs just before announcing them to company employees? Why or why not?

**Answer:** The students’ answers will vary by student. They should agree that the Internet posting was not appropriate before notice was given to the employees directly. Although the reason was potentially a good one, the execution could lead to deep psychological and social negative impact among employees. Communicate to the employees first, then post to offset publicity.

2. Do you think employees have a responsibility to be careful about what they blog about their company? Why or why not?

**Answer:** The students' answers should agree that such blogs might cause themselves and the company unnecessary problems in today's litigious society.

3. Do you think employees who blog about their companies have an ethical responsibility to disclose their identities?

**Answer:** Students will likely say "No." But the highest ethically responsible position is that identities should be revealed. Anonymous diatribes about an organization might cause base rumors and negative reactions among those exposed to the statements. When identified, posters could be evaluated for course credibility to judge the significance of the statements.

4. How can a company develop a policy for handling communication of sensitive issues inside, and outside, the company?

**Answer:** A company should:

- a. Define the objective it wants to achieve in influencing personal posting.
- b. Define a clear and unambiguous policy about the company's position.
- c. Create training publications to inform about the policy and why it is important to the employee.
- d. Hold regular training sessions to ensure employees understand the policy and its reason for being defined.

*Sources:* Based on C. C. Miller, "In Era of Blog Sniping, Companies Shoot First," *New York Times* (November 5, 2008), pp. B1, B11; M. Allison, "More Layoffs Expected at Starbucks," *Seattle Times* (January 24, 2009), [seattletimes.nwsourc.com](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com); and C. Hirschman, "Giving Voice to Employee Concerns," *HR Magazine* (August 2008), pp. 51–53.

## Instructor's Choice

Where is the hottest market for business today? If you answered the 60 million Americans born between 1979 and 1994, you just won the prize. These Generation Y or Digital Generation kids will be a sizable market force in the years to come. Though this generation and its vast spending power are enough to whet marketers' appetites, there may be problems on the horizon for organizations that are banking on attracting this dynamic market.

First, this market is highly tech-savvy and expects communication from marketers to be just as savvy. Text messages via cell phones, high-speed links (broadband) with music and video venues, and instant messaging are but a few of the communication channels that this generation expects marketers to master if consumption dollars are to flow their way.

Second, this generation wants to use communication to link itself with organizations as well as other members of the generation. The popularity of video games that allow for multiple players in different parts of the country and the usage of cell-phone text messages to participate or vote in television reality shows such as *American Idol* show the degree of commitment to new communication forms.

Finally, this generation is also the Zap Generation where TiVo and other devices allow viewers to bypass traditional communication formats and get right to the programming. To effectively communicate with this generation, organizations will have to try new communication venues such as product placement in visual programs and digital billboards in such places as stadiums and shopping malls.

- Using a search engine of your own choosing, investigate product placement. Write a short paper that describes how the process works and why it can be a lucrative channel of communication for a marketer.
- Using a search engine of your own choosing, investigate digital billboards and other visual presentation formats that seem to be preferred by this generation. Comment on the perceived effectiveness of such formats.
- Lastly, list three other communication techniques that might be used to stimulate attention and response from this generation. Explain your rationale in making the suggestions that you made.

### **Instructor Discussion**

To assist the instructor in the preparation of this activity, read "Channeling the Future," by Stephen Baker, *Business Week*, July 12, 2004, pp. 70–72. Author Don Tapscott also has produced several books that also address the subject of appealing and communicating with the Digital Generation. Since the majority of the students in the class are members of this generation, the subject of communication with this generation should be an easy one to discuss. For example, students can be asked what their favorite communication venues are. Next, ask them what the favorite venues of their parents are. Note differences in the preferences. Lastly, ask the students how an organization should communicate with them. Have students understand that communication for purposes of consumption might be very different from

communication that might prove to be effective in the workplace. Have students discuss what these differences might be.



### **EXPLORING OB TOPICS ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB**

Search Engines are our navigational tool to explore the WWW. Some commonly used search engines are:

[www.goto.com](http://www.goto.com)  
[www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com)

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)  
[www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com)

[www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)  
[www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com)

1. Listening requires more than a physical presence—it requires a mental presence too! Learn more about how to develop your skills as an empathetic listener at: <http://crs.uvm.edu/gopher/nerl/personal/comm/e.html>. Write a short journal entry describing how you plan to further develop one technique listed in the article.
2. Are there do's and don'ts for e-mail? Learn more by doing a search on “netiquette,” which are the courtesy guidelines of e-mail. Print one of the better pages and bring to class along with an e-mail you have sent or received recently. Take off the names of the parties in the e-mail. In class, we will edit these e-mails for breeches of Netiquette guidelines.
3. Organizational communication has been drastically changed by the introduction of modern technologies just in the last 10 years. However, it does not just happen. There must be support personnel and products to assist users with communication via technology. Go to <http://www.databasesystemscorp.com/pscproducts.htm> to explore one vendor's products and services to support organizational communication. Write a short journal entry about what you learn from this Web site.
4. Learn more about effective cross-cultural communication. Go to the Web site <http://www.nwrel.org/cnorse/booklets/ccc/>. The first four chapters are particularly interesting. Write a paragraph or two about what you learned from this page.
5. Open-Book Management has worked for many companies. To learn more, go to Inc. Magazine's Web site and key in “pen book management” using the search feature. A number of articles are available for review. Additionally, the following Web sites also have more information. Write a one-page “summary” on what you learned.

[http://www.nceo.org/library/obm\\_poolcovers.html](http://www.nceo.org/library/obm_poolcovers.html)  
[http://www.nceo.org/library/obm\\_nceostudy.html](http://www.nceo.org/library/obm_nceostudy.html)

6. What is an intranet and how does it work? Chances are if you have not been on one here at school or at work, you will be in the future. Go to <http://www.netxs.com.pk/intranet/index.htm> for a comprehensive look at intranets and organizations that have put them to work to increase organizational effectiveness through communication.