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MEMORANDUM

To: Professor Meisel, General Manager

From: Sample Student, Guest Services Manager

Date: 10-23-12

Subject: Investigative Report RE: Social Network Client Fraternization

Description:

Attached is the requested investigative report regarding the effectiveness of the fraternization policy between clients and employees. Specifically this report investigates the ambiguity in regards to social networking relations and its contributions to prohibited fraternization.

This report includes two examples with client fraternization in which the social networking site Facebook contributed to prohibited fraternization which resulted in disciplinary action.

This report serves as a reason to improve upon the fraternization policy in the Employee Handbook to include specifics regarding appropriate relations via social networking sites. I can be reached at 818.874.1300 or SJerabek@biggestloserresort.com with questions, comments, or concerns regarding this report.

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INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

CLIENT FRATERNIZATION VIA SOCIAL NETWORKS/SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

PREPARED BY STUDENT FIRST NAME AND LAST NAME

GUEST SERVICES MANAGER

REPORT DISTRIBUTED OCTOBER 23, 2012

PREPARED FOR

PROFESSOR MEISEL, GENERAL MANAGER

THE BIGGEST LOSER RESORT AT FITNESS RIDGE MALIBU

**INTRODUCTION**

This report investigates the employee-guest fraternization policy in place and its effectiveness in preventing client fraternization via social networks. As requested, this report will investigate effectiveness in the workplace as well as use evidence to suggest possible solutions to any issues that may arise with ineffective policies.

**Current Policy**

The purpose of the current fraternization policy in place is to prevent inappropriate relationships between current guests of the resort and staff. It strongly discourages inappropriate relationships between staff and guest who have checked out of the resort as well stating “Even after guests leave the facility to go home, friendship/social activities are strongly discouraged. Do not socialize with guests other than what is required by your job descriptions. Violations of this policy can lead to disciplinary action and possible termination”.

The policy clearly states that employees should not have any relationship with current guests that shall reflect poorly upon the company. This is specific to *current* guests meaning guests who have checked into the resort, not those that have checked out. The policy does not specify relationships via social networks though it can be assumed that any relationship whether via face to face interaction, phone calls, text messages, as well as internet based that can be considered “inappropriate” are not allowed. The client base, generally being an emotional one in which many guests can be emotionally vulnerable, emotionally dependent, as well as in a position that requires a lot of support from the staff. Allowing any contact between guests and staff via social networks can suggest that staff are more than a support system but also close friends in which the employee-client relationship becomes a friendship relationship which can allow for behavior that is not tolerated by the company. The reason it is not tolerated is because it can affect the guest experience in a negative way if the relationship does not progress in a manner they prefer. Following are examples of inappropriate relationships between current guests and staff. Directly following those examples are reasons the current policy needs to be improved to remove ambiguity as well as reasons why social networks may have been the cause of the informal relationship that resulted in inappropriate conduct.

**PAST CASES**

**Example One:**

*Incident*

Karen Johnson was a guest of The Biggest Loser Resort at Fitness Ridge Malibu from January 8, 2012- June 17 2012. This is considered a long-term stay as it was almost 6 months with the average stay of a guest being between 2-3 weeks at a time. Karen did not leave the resort for the 6 months for more than a weekend. During her stay she formed relationships with many people on the staff, which considering the length of her stay is to be expected. She did however form what is considered an inappropriate relationship with one staff member, named Trish Jacobs, who is one of the trainers at the resort. This relationship appeared to be appropriate according to the standards laid out in the handbook until it was reported by Ms. Johnson that she felt she was no longer being supported by Ms. Johnson and felt as though she was being targeted in classes as “lazy,” and “not working very hard.” After speaking with Ms. Jacobs who admitted to having been contacted by Ms. Johnson via the social networking site Facebook, investigation confirmed that the relationship that had evolved between Ms. Jacobs and Ms. Johnson was not appropriate. Conversations that occurred between this staff member and this guest were of a very informal nature and used both inappropriate language as well as inappropriate topics such as sexual relationships and drug use.

*Conclusions*

Although the policy written in the employee handbook that was signed by Ms. Jacobs clearly states that this type of fraternization is not tolerated, it does not specify types of communication and may allow for an informal relationship to begin as social networks generally are not considered formal avenues of communication.

**Example Two:**

*Incident*

One employee was found to be fraternizing with current guests off site, while off duty, in a manner in which the company does not support. This situation was documented in a disciplinary action form as the fraternization policy strictly prohibits this type of socialization. In this situation, the social networking site Facebook was used to communicate about meeting at the aforementioned events. This employee claims that the guests of the resort knew where they would be based on posts they put on their personal Facebook pages and took it upon themselves to show up at the events which allowed for the fraternization to occur.

*Conclusion*

Although this employee was aware that his behaviors were not acceptable and disciplinary action would be taken, it is believed that the fraternization would not have occurred had the informal relationship not been established by the social networking site. While it is not the fault of the employee that the guests found them at the events, it is still the fault of the employee for engaging in inappropriate behavior.

**FINDINGS:**

According to a study of online social networks done by the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication it is likely that while two participants engage in relations via social networking site, one of the participants may view the relationship as more friendly than the other participant. (Garton, Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2006) There are benefits to interactions via social networks between client and employee and as such this type of communication cannot be discredited. According to the American Bar Association, after assessing the use of social networks for lawyers, it was suggested that social networking sites such as LinkedIn can be a good tool in online marketing and increasing awareness regarding the employees and their professional capababilites. (Beans, 2012) LinkedIn is different from Facebook with a separate purpose which should be noted as it more of a formal relationship though some of the same issues may occur.

**CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS:**

It is clear that the fraternization policy in place prohibits the types of fraternization mentioned in this report. It does raise caution that the relationships that are established and continue via social networks can allow for informal communication sending the wrong message. It is recommended that the company revise its fraternization policy to define appropriate and inappropriate relationships as well as formal and informal communication. While I appreciate the effectiveness of social network communication to establish and continue relationships that benefit the employee/company, it is recommended that employees not be allowed to communicate via social networks while the guests are still checked into the resort. Communication via social networks should only be allowed when the guests check out and then these relationships must follow what the handbook already states about after guests leave and off-duty conflict of interest.

**REFERENCES**

Beans, C. (2012). *Using social networking sites to connect to clients, lawyers, and*

*others*. Retrieved from http://apps.americanbar.org/litigation/litigationnews/practice\_areas/tech-social-networking.html

Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C., & Wellman, B. (2006). Studying online social

networks. *Journal of computer mediated communication*, *3*(1), 0. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/%28ISSN%291083-6101>

**APPENDIX A**

**Excerpt taken from the Employee Handbook written for The Biggest Loser Resort at Fitness Ridge Malibu:**

**“Non-Fraternization**

Neither will any employee initiate or conduct a romantic relationship with a Company guest while the guest is on premises. Employees are advised to strongly discourage any advances from a Company guest

The Company employees are always representatives of the Company and the Company program.

At no time and in no manner should employees socialize with or find themselves conducting activities with current Company guests that are not specifically sanctioned by the Company. This includes both on-site and off-site activities. Activities include but are not limited to fitness activities (hiking, biking or tennis), eating out, and any other social engagement.

Even after guests leave the facility to go home, friendship/social activities are strongly discouraged. Do not socialize with guests other than what is required by your job descriptions. Violations of this policy can lead to disciplinary action and possible termination.

All employees should remember that the Company maintains a strict policy against unlawful harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment.”

**Excerpt taken from the Employee Handbook written for The Biggest Loser Resort at Fitness Ridge Malibu:**

**“Conflict of Interest**

An employee is required to avoid any conflict of interest during his or her employment by the Company. Any involvement that conflicts with an employee’s duties or responsibilities or affects the employee’s judgment in making a decision affecting the Company will be considered a conflict of interest. This includes any direct or indirect business, management or financial interest or activity, whether or not for compensation, in any business or entity that is a competitor, supplier or vendor of the Company.

Employees may engage in or have outside business or personal interest activities that do not constitute a conflict of interest with their employment by the Company. The Company requires that these activities or interests do not adversely affect an employee’s capacity to perform his or her functions or result in conflicting loyalties.”

**APPENDIX B**

**Disciplinary Action Form Pertaining to Example Two (Attached)**