

Power Tools: Social Media and Our Work

By Joe Gerstandt



Expert Forum



I get to participate in a lot of conferences, especially this time of year. Many of the conferences that I am involved in are focused on human resources work, but I also get the opportunity to speak at education, healthcare, social media, innovation, non-profit, leadership and other types of events.

One of the common themes across all of these disciplines, over the past couple of years, is that people are talking about social media. Whether they love it, hate it or are not yet decided, they are talking about social media. They are talking about the what, why and how of social media and how to apply it to their work and how to help their organization make well informed decisions about these tools. Everyone is talking about social media...everyone except diversity and inclusion folks, that is. And this is a problem.

Not only can we ill afford to be out of the loop on any significant change impacting organizations and communities, these new tools happen to be incredibly relevant and applicable to our work. I think it is no exaggeration to say that there may not be another body of work that social media tools are more ideally designed for. It seems to me that if there are going to be radical and transformational steps ahead of us in how we do the work that we do, that they will involve the integration of social technology.

Part of our disconnect on this issue is that social technology is still thought of as being primarily about technology...the domain of coders and designers, hipsters and marketers. Social media is really not as much about technology as it is about "social." Used properly this is a set of tools for building new relationships and new kinds of relationships, for architecting new social spaces and creating community. We are talking here about a set of tools that are uniquely effective towards telling our story, bearing witness to the stories of others, seeking context, building bridges, sharing information, diffusing power and disrupting the conformity and status quo of our hierarchical and siloed organizations...which sounds to me a lot like what you and I are called to.

These tools also represent new ways for us to learn and grow as practitioners. New ways for us to find each other, challenge each other and support each other. This new toolbox can change our work, how we do our work, and how we get better at doing our work.

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It is also important to note that this is not just about Facebook or Twitter. There is a whole lot of stuff in this big noisy bucket that we call social media, for example:

- blogs
- microblogs
- location based applications
- social networks
- aggregators
- wikis
- social bookmarking
- social news
- multimedia

In each of these categories are dozens and in some cases hundreds of different applications and platforms. Facebook and Twitter are big and popular and powerful, but they are just one slice of the pie...and this is part of the reason why the entire subject can quickly become overwhelming.

None of us are going to become experts on all of this stuff anytime soon and do not need to, but as a discipline we need to get social media savvy and we need to do it now. So start somewhere. Make sure that you are spending some time on Twitter and LinkedIn and Facebook so that you are familiar with them and so that you are familiar with how other individuals and organizations are using them. Ask questions, in my experience Twitter and LinkedIn are both full of people ready and willing to help. Find conferences, publications, on-line communities where people are talking about putting these tools to work.

I suggest to you that understanding, experimenting with and integrating social media into our work and our professional growth must be one of our highest priorities moving forward.