**Chapter 1**

**Zoom**i**ng In Critical Thinking Answers**

* **After reading this case study, can you put into perspective the suggestion “have fun and be yourself”? What exactly does this invitation mean? **

The invitation to “have fun and be yourself” is issued at the end of the policy guidelines that focus very specifically on ethical communication. It means that certain limitations must be observed as described in the policy. It’s not a blanket endorsement to engage in whatever may be “fun” to do online. Whenever employees are not sure what’s acceptable, they are required to speak to their manager. For media inquiries they are asked to contact the PR team.

* **Why does Nordstrom allow only certain employees to connect online with customers and other members of the public?**

Nordstrom understands that any employees who post on Facebook, Pinterest, or Twitter are viewed as company representatives, not private individuals. Whether positive or negative, their behavior reflects on the company’s reputation. Nordstrom clearly wants its representatives to speak with one voice and not engage in questionable behavior. The company may also recognize that not all employees have the requisite writing and communication skills. In fact, any mention of how exactly Nordstrom staff should write is noticeably absent. This omission suggests that the company carefully handpicks whom it wishes to represent it to protect its corporate image (the term *approved employees* suggests selectiveness).

* **Why do social media guidelines emphasize ethical behavior and ethical communication?**

Organizations such as Nordstrom have core values, or principles, that guide their day-to-day business activities. For example, Nordstrom is committed to an unparalleled customer service experience. That has translated into strategic decisions that emphasize proper conduct. A “fabulous customer experience” is impossible without fairness and solid ethics. Customer relationships thrive on trust. Reputation is fragile; it takes very long to build, but is easily damaged.

**Ethics Check Answers**

**Too Connected?**

Most of us would probably agree that it is not appropriate to take a call in the restroom, yet extreme forms of connectedness exist in the workplace. Trading partners may be on call in the middle of the night to accommodate their international counterparts in different time zones. Some office workers must be willing to reply to queries after hours and on weekends. The very concept of after hours is being eroded by instant communication. Although e-mail is an asynchronous messaging system because its reception cannot be controlled, the sender usually expects a response within 24 hours. Discuss with students some people’s desire to escape their electronic leashes.

**Office Grapevine**   
Aside from the advantages and the general accuracy of the office grapevine, participating in this informal communication channel can spell trouble. Meaning can be distorted, and even colleagues we trust may mangle our words or reveal a secret with which we entrusted them. On the other hand, savvy workers are able to work the grapevine to their advantage by purposely leaking their work-related accomplishments. Similarly, by tapping into the grapevine, they may be able indirectly to expose a coworker who clearly did wrong. Although honesty generally is the best policy, sometimes directness is not the smartest option.

**Blurt Out the Truth?**

If the employment situation with your employer is that bad, you should probably be looking for another position yourself. However, if you must give a response, try to find something positive to say about the firm without lying. Are the benefits good? Are some supervisors better than others? Do employees find satisfaction in some tasks? If nothing positive comes to mind, sidestep the question by explaining that others might be better able to answer that question than you. Do not lie for your employer.

**Critical Thinking Answers**

1. **What could be the career fallout for someone who is unwilling or unable to train to become a better communicator? Can workers today be successful if their writing is and remains poor?**

Each of us probably knows at least one example of a highly successful dyslexic person or a poor writer who is admired and thrives in the world of work. However, such cases are the exception rather than the rule. Surveys of employers find over and over again that woefully unprepared young job applicants fall behind in their careers and are not promoted if they are even hired in the first place.

1. **Sharing various digital media impulsively can lead to embarrassment and worse. Have you or has someone you know ever regretted posting a comment, photo, or other media online? (**

Answers will vary. Some students may be too embarrassed to admit to serious blunders on the Internet, whereas others may be willing to share. Ask students how such slip-ups could affect their chances of finding employment. You could also discuss the permanence of our data and the so-called right to be forgotten that the Europeans have asserted against Google and other Internet search giants. The concept means that people wish to not be haunted by their indiscretions practically forever.

1. **How do you feel about the work-life balance in today’s 24/7 “anytime, anywhere” digital workplace? Do you anticipate negative effects on your health and personal life?**

Answers will vary, but most students are probably aware that being constantly tethered to their jobs with smart mobile technology comes at a price. A potential overreach by the office is the dark side of convenience and 24/7 connectedness facilitated by smart devices. The distinction between work and leisure is becoming blurry, and workers are expected to be always on duty. The whole concept of time off will most likely shift. Businesses with a global reach are always on and never sleep, according to experts. The work-life imbalance will continue to be a hot topic.

1. **Critics complain that texting and instant messaging lead to *textspeak,* poor writing characterized by acronyms, abbreviations, and emoticons. Others have claimed that emoji help supply important missing cues in lean media channels that are “toneless” otherwise. What do you think?**

The author of *The Atlantic* article cites a sociolinguist who says that emoticons and emoji are revolutionizing language and add intention to a statement in e-mail, a lean medium. Business communicator Will Schwalbe is quoted as saying that in the absence of tone in e-mail and other lean media, people read negative tone into it. Emoticons make for a more cheerful, friendly communication, Schwalbe says. A Scandinavian study has found that emoticons reduce negative interpretations. In addition, even work e-mail is becoming more casual and emoticons more acceptable. However, a career coach cautions that emoticons and emoji should not be used with superiors or clients. Warn students that they will not find uniform acceptance when using nonstandard expressions of this kind. Young office workers need to consider their audience.

1. **Ethical Issue: Josh in the Accounting Department tells you that he heard from a reliable source that 15 percent of the staff will be fired within 120 days. You would love to share this juicy news with other department members, for their own defense and planning. Should you? Why or why not?**

It would be unwise to spread this rumor. The source is not reliable. In addition, if the organization had wanted employees to know, it would have made the announcement itself. Moreover, if the rumor is false, it will have needlessly upset other employees. Let the company take care of making announcements of this sort.

# Zooming In Solution

**Your Turn: Applying Your Skills at Nordstrom**

Answers will vary, but generally Nordstrom’s interactions with customers are warm, compassionate, and casual. They seem to be driven by a genuine desire to help, answer queries, resolve problems, or commiserate. Nordstrom representatives come across as real human beings, not corporate shills. The followers in the following exchange even step in to help the Nordstrom representatives quell the discontent that seems to grow after one disappointed customer begins to vent and others chime in. Students could also be asked to find examples of posts by Nordstrom representatives that could be rewritten because they seem too casual or show misspellings, missing commas, and more—as rare as such grievous errors may be, given that Nordstrom handpicks its social media representatives.

One of the social media use guidelines admonishes users to be humble, meaning that Nordstrom employees should deliver excellent customer service but not brag about it because mistakes do happen. More advanced students could be prompted to look for this attitude of humbleness or respecting customer privacy.

# Activities Solutions

**1.1 Social Media Inventory**

The generalization that young people today are digital natives and as such must all be extremely tech savvy may not apply equally to all students, not even the millennials among them. Taking stock of students’ social media and technology use can be important for getting to know the class and its members’ preparedness. Assign the inventory activity to small groups or collect written responses from individuals if you fear that students might hesitate to admit that they do not fit the stereotype of the hyperconnected contemporary and do not own the latest electronics, particularly given that gadgets tend to be expensive. You may also want to ask about attitudes: how important are smartphones and staying connected with friends via text or Facebook to the students? Do they see any disadvantages in being connected nonstop?

**1.2 Collaborating on the Opening Case Study**

This activity takes place over the entire semester. Student teams have a choice of 1 of the 16 two-part case studies in the textbook. Each team must fully research the company in the case study using outside resources, answer the questions presented, and prepare and deliver a group presentation about the company. This excellent long-term project helps students develop teamwork, research, writing, and presentation skills.

**1.3 Introducing Yourself**

This e-mail or memo is an excellent way to assess students’ skills and, at the same time, get to know them. Don’t grade this assignment, but be sure to write a friendly comment on all papers or in all e-mail replies to demonstrate that you have an interest in them as students and as individuals.

You may want to use the profile function in your institution’s learning-management system to request that students create a professional profile covering the information requested or additional information you may want to gather. This assignment may be revisited later in the term to practice professional online presence (e.g., in a LinkedIn profile) when you cover employment communication. If you are tech savvy and teach smaller classes, you may want to try introductions by tweet in 140 characters or fewer. These messages might include a tiny URL taking the recipient to a profile, website, or other virtual location. More information about using LinkedIn is provided in Chapter 15.

**1.4 Small-Group Presentation: Introducing Team Members**

Decide whether you wish your class to (a) interview a group member and introduce that person to the group or (b) have each class member introduce himself or herself to the entire class. Class size may help you decide. Encourage students to consider this a casual introduction. However, it is a good opportunity for students to not only learn about each other but also start to develop the skills needed to speak in front of a group.

The informal oral assignment induces students to start thinking about their employability skills. It could be more structured by asking students to write the information they find out in the interview to create a short biographical sketch. The purpose is to have them start thinking about their professional presentations of themselves and others on professional social media sites such as LinkedIn and in other forums of public opinion. If students are not on LinkedIn yet, explain to them that it’s about time they created an account!

**1.5 Communication Skills: Employer Wish List**

Students may work in groups or individually on this project. Consider grouping them by their majors. Provide poster board and glue sticks for each group to mount their job posts. If available, a computer with a projector and Internet access could display the results. You may want to have a spokesperson from each group come to the front of the classroom to report the group’s findings.

**1.6 Writing Skills: But My Job Won’t Require Writing!**

**a. No one really writes anymore. They just text and send e-mails.**

Everyone writes in today’s workplace—and probably more than people ever did in the past. In professional workplaces, e-mail has become the most important communication channel. Texting is less important. Regardless, all messages sent in the workplace must be businesslike and effective. This means they should be clear, concise, courteous, complete, and correct. They are indeed *real* writing and require more skill and preparation than e-mail and texting to friends. What’s more, as companies grow larger and become less cohesive, the written word becomes even more important. Because fewer people are working side by side, written messages replace face-to-face conversation. Those who can craft clear messages will be most successful.

**b. Because I'm in a technical field, I will work with numbers, not words.**

Estimates suggest that nearly 90 percent of all business messages involve written communication. Conducting business in any field—even in technical and specialized areas such as information technology, accounting, engineering, marketing, and hotel management—involves some writing. “You can have the greatest technical skills in the world, but without solid communication skills, who will know and can understand?” said Kevin Jetton, executive vice president of the Association of Information Technology Professionals. [Jacobs, P. 1998, July 6. Strong writing skills essential for success. *InfoWorld*, 86.] Moreover, when individuals are promoted, their writing tasks increase.

**c. Secretaries will clean up my writing problems.**

In the current work world of tightened budgets and economic downturn, only a few upper-level executives still have secretaries or administrative assistants who type their messages. Most managers and executives now write their own e-mails, memos, and letters.

**d. Technical writers do most of the real writing on the job.**

Some companies employ technical writers to prepare manuals, documentation, and public documents, such as annual reports. Rarely, however, do these specialists write everyday messages (internal reports, letters, e-mails, memos) for employees.

**e. Today’s sophisticated software programs can fix any of my writing mistakes.**

Today’s style-, grammar-, and spell-checkers are wonderful aids to business writers. They can highlight selected trouble areas and occasionally suggest revisions. What they can’t do, though, is organize and write the document and ensure its total accuracy. These tools are also not capable of catching all errors, especially commonly confused words and punctuation.

**f. I can use forms and templates for most messages.**

Books and computer programs can provide dozens of ready-made letters or pattern paragraphs for which businesspeople merely fill in the blanks. When these letters are appropriate and well written, they can be useful time-savers. Often, however, such letters are poorly written and ill suited for specific situations. Most messages demand that writers create their own original thoughts.

# 1.7 Exploring Work-Life Balance and Tweeting About It

Answers will vary. Examples could look something like this:

**Tweets***Are smartphones and social media to blame for lost work/life balance? http://tinyurl.com/pafppw2 #worklifebalance* (112 characters)

[Mike Harden. 2015, January 3. Why work-life balance is a myth. *The Huffington Post.*]

*Survey identifies five trends that have killed work-life balance http://tinyurl.com/o6ah8xx #worklifebalance* (107 characters)

[Akane Otani. 2015, May 5. Five charts that show work-life balance is dead. Bloomberg Business.]

Note: To facilitate the character count for Twitter, be sure to enable “column” to show up on the bottom of the MS Word frame. Open the pop-up menu that will allow you to select “column” by right-clicking the status bar on the bottom of the MS Word window and checking the appropriate box.

**Social Media Posts**

*Compelling advice from an executive coach: The idea of work/life balance is flawed because a perfect balance can’t be achieved. Do you agree?*

[Mike Harden, Huffington Post, 23 words]

The article discusses a study of full-time workers who experience much pressure because they are always on call and struggle to balance work and leisure. Is your life well balanced?

[Akane Otani, Bloomberg Business, 30 words]

Note: A social media post is usually written with the expectation that it will elicit a response.

**Summaries**

*Executive coach and blogger Mike Harden decries the comingling of work and leisure. He blames mobile devices and social media for sapping workers of time, thus shortchanging their families because they are always plugged in. He advises that workers remain flexible and prioritize what is important to them each day and to try to be fully present.*

[Mike Harden, 568 words, summary is 57 words]

*An Ernst & Young survey of 9,700 workers worldwide found that the respondents struggle with balancing work and leisure. Employees are stressed out by long work weeks, greater obligations for their families and on the job, by always being on call, lackluster job opportunities, and by the absence of parental-leave benefits.*

[Akane Otani, 512 words, summary is 10 percent of that, 51 words]

**1.8 Oral or Written Communication: How Rich Must the Media Be?**

a. Text or e-mail, possibly call, if it’s not going to disrupt the meeting, depending on the importance of the meeting and your role in it. As a junior member of the team, you would want to call to provide immediate feedback, adjust to the audience, and deliver your message quickly. A telephone call is not as rich a medium as a face-to-face encounter, but comes closer than a text message or e-mail in conveying positive emotion and a personal approach.

b. Phoning is out of the question because it’s only 5 a.m. Pacific time (PST) and your questions—while time sensitive—are not urgent. If the queries are not too involved and lengthy, you could send an e-mail; otherwise, a brief message simply requesting that your colleague call you back seems sufficient. You could phone a little later, at 8:30 or 9 a.m. PST. If you and your collaborator share an application that allows instant messaging or live chatting (e.g., Skype, Windows Live Messenger, or Yahoo Messenger), turn it on, so that you will see when your collaborator goes online. Before you do so, however, check your company’s policies on appropriate Web, e-mail, and social media use. Some businesses prohibit or limit the use of instant messaging to prevent abuse such as harassment and security risks.

c. Policies flowing downward from management to subordinates should be written. They produce a permanent record, are economical, promote comprehension and recall, allow precise and uniform expression, and give the audience flexibility in when and how to receive the content. Although John has two employees in mind, the policy should be directed to all employees, most likely in an e-mail or intranet post.

d. When an immediate answer is required, the message should be delivered orally, by telephone. In this instance, you may need to follow up with additional questions. If the matter is particularly urgent, a face-to-face visit may be necessary as long as it is feasible and the person is nearby (i.e., in-house). Oral communication provides immediate feedback, can be adjusted to the audience, can be delivered quickly, supplies nonverbal cues, may create a warm, personal feeling, and can make a big impact. The message is traveling horizontally between coworkers.

e. Messages as traumatic as termination should always be delivered in person—one-on-one or with a limited number of participants. Oral communication provides immediate feedback, can be adjusted to the audience, supplies nonverbal cues, and shows greater compassion than a written message.

f. Responding to an upset customer should always be done orally, if possible. The best procedure is to first call the customer and explain what happened. Oral communication allows you to show sympathy, apologize, and suggest possible alternate solutions. After the telephone call, it’s wise to follow up with a written message confirming what was said. In most cases e-mail would be the channel of choice, although in particularly grievous cases, when formality is desired, a business letter sent by mail may be more appropriate. The written message clarifies the situation, creates a permanent record, promotes comprehension and recall, and generates goodwill.

g. Explaining a committee’s findings should be done in a written report traveling upward. Such a report provides a permanent record and is convenient to distribute. It provides precise and uniform expression. However, such a report lacks the richness and immediacy of oral communication and cannot be adjusted to respond to the receiver’s comments or questions. Depending on the context, a face-to-face briefing to management with visuals (slideshows) may be called for. Slide decks also provide a record, albeit a less formal one than traditional reports.

**1.9**  **Information Flow: What’s Good and Bad About Gossip at Work?**

Mr. Bender responded in an appropriate manner by going to the source and talking about the reason behind the gossip. Experts suggest seeking out the source of malicious gossip and documenting what was learned or discussed.

Benefits of workplace gossip include the following:

1. Managers can keep a pulse on what is happening by relying on information from employees who are known for spreading and knowing office gossip.
2. Managers can learn about morale, turnover, and productivity problems.
3. Managers can also plant news that they want spread. For example, if layoffs are approaching, managers might soften the blow by letting rumors start about future layoffs.
4. Gossip can also be helpful in building office friendships and team morale.
5. Gossip can benefit new employees who are learning office customs not covered in the official company handbook.

Negative consequences of gossip include the following:

1. People who gossip are considered untrustworthy and may not be promoted.
2. Malicious, false gossip can create severe unhappiness and destroy careers.
3. Malicious gossip creates an ugly work environment forcing people to leave.
4. People who spend excessive amounts of time gossiping are a productivity drain on the company.
5. Companies that do not prevent malicious gossip may be sued for tolerating or condoning a hostile work environment.

**1.10 Lax Attitudes Toward Ethics Among Active Social Networkers?**

Although the National Business Ethics Survey was conducted in 2011 and published in 2012, it is undoubtedly still relevant, if only to spark a discussion about workplace behavior. To protect the guilty and to avoid putting individuals on the spot, a classroom discussion should probably be general, focusing on the unethical behaviors, not on the students’ individual responses, unless they decide to share their attitudes publicly. Alternatively, you may choose to examine the study with your students without surveying their responses. Evaluating the questionable workplace behaviors alone, with the Five Questions to Guide Ethical Decisions earlier in this chapter, could be an invaluable teachable moment for your students. Naturally, the discussion can be held asynchronously on Blackboard or Moodle.

**1.11 Ethical Dilemmas: Applying Tools for Doing the Right Thing**

Students responses will vary, of course. They should apply each question from the “tools for doing the right thing” list and explain their answers in relation to the dilemma.