ADAA Update September 2017

President’s Message: Digging in Your Digital Dirt

“We don’t have a choice whether we do social media; the question is how well we do it.’ – Erik Qualman, author

Congratulations on choosing an amazing profession with unlimited possibilities. If you are just beginning your dental assisting program, know that things will get easier as you become more absorbed in the material. For those who are already partway through your programs, congratulations for sticking with your choice in becoming a dental assistant. To those starting out on a new venture, best wishes. And to those of you happily plugging away where you are, I commend you.

Today, we all rely on various modes of technology to make it through the day. As a seasoned dental assistant, I rely on social networking to keep up with what is going on in dentistry through Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, email as well as text messages from colleagues in the industry. It’s truly amazing what you can learn at the press of a button.

Daily, I visit the ADAA Facebook page to read the various threads of information being given and sought. The page is always a good place to find out what is going on in the dental assisting community. A common thread of late is the inability to find a job after graduating and taking any necessary exams to work in a given state, despite a nationwide shortage of dental assistants. Reading the various posts from all over and from assistants with various levels of experience prompted me to write on this topic as a word of encouragement to you as you complete your dental assisting programs and also as a friendly reminder about what not to do in order to succeed in the dental industry. (Some material posted could be viewed as questionable by a prospective employer.)

As of summer 2017, Facebook has more than 2 billion monthly active users, LinkedIn is used by 500 million, and Twitter has 342 million accounts, representing a fertile ground for posting comments and pictures for anyone with Internet access. A number of other social media sites are available as well, increasing the exposure of posts and tweets. As the amount of personal information available online grows, first impressions are being formed long before the interview process begins. According to a 2016 survey conducted by Careerbuilder.com, 60 percent of employers use social media sites to screen job applicants. Employers can either be negatively or positively influenced by the content they see on a potential employee’s social media sites. According to Careerbuilder.com, forty-nine percent of hiring managers who screen candidates via social networks said they’ve found information that caused them not to hire a candidate. The following are the top pieces of content that turned off these employers:

- Offensive or inappropriate photographs or information, 46 percent
- Information about candidate drinking or using drugs, 43 percent
- Discriminatory comments related to race, religion, gender, etc., 33 percent
- Candidate bad-mouthed previous company or fellow employee, 31 percent
- Poor communication skills, 29 percent

About one-third of employers who screen candidates via social networks (32 percent), however, found information that caused them to hire a candidate, including:

- Candidate’s background information supported job qualifications, 44 percent
- Candidate’s site conveyed a professional image, 44 percent
- Candidate’s personality came across as a good fit with company culture, 43 percent
- Candidate was well-rounded, showed a wide range of interests, 40 percent
- Candidate had great communication skills, 36 percent

Not all employers search candidates and employees online, but the trend is definitely growing as social networking remains in the forefront of daily activities for many. Don’t let online social networking destroy your career opportunities. Protect your image by following these simple tips:

**Be careful about being too opinionated.** Nothing is private so don’t post anything on your site or your “friends” sites you wouldn’t want a prospective employer to see. Derogatory comments, revealing or risqué photos, foul language, and lewd jokes all will be viewed as a reflection of your character even if your character is different. If you are voicing a strong opinion in regards to religion, politics, race, and past, present and future employers, you might want to be careful about how free your speech is. You may have strong beliefs regarding religion or politics, but there’s no need to attack someone else’s beliefs. The same goes for complaining about employers while you are still under their employment. A
future employer might stumble across your profile, read comments from months or even years ago, and decide you are not a suitable candidate especially if you are complaining about your current employer.

Be discreet and honest. There is always an element of risk when posting online, because you can't always control who is going to be reading or watching your social media accounts. If nothing else, acquaint yourself with privacy settings and keep in mind that the Internet remembers everything. If your social networking media offers the option to set your profile as “private” so that only your friends can view, consider changing to this setting. Since you cannot control what others say on your site, you may want to also consider using the “block comments” feature for those who have difficulty remaining professional in their remarks. Being honest in your achievements and information on your networking sites is crucial. It is important to remember that everything on the Internet is archived and there is no ‘delete or edit button’ for stored material.

Photos of you posted or tagged. They say a picture is worth 1,000 words, but you may have to come up with 1,000 explanations for why it was on your social networking site instead. The best line of defense is to not have any questionable photographs taken at all, but if it can't be helped, then sharing such photographs in a private album meant for selected and trusted eyes of your friends only would be the safest way to go. Additionally, consider your profile picture used on your profiles: Does it lend a professional image? If not, you may want to consider changing it.

For those of who may have already found employment and you want to use your profile to get hired or—or to least not get fired—keep these three basic rules in mind:

Don't publicize interviews, raises, or new employment opportunities. How you talk about any of these sensitive topics on your social networking site is critical. If you're unemployed, writing "Interview today—wish me luck!" would be OK. Or if you got a job, something along the lines of "So excited about my new job!" is totally acceptable. If you're currently employed, however, I don't think your boss would be too happy to see something like, “Tired of my job and will be calling in sick tomorrow for an interview!” You may just find yourself without your current job and no leads with the position you are interviewing for.

Don't bad mouth your current or previous employer. Just like in an interview, keep your angry outbursts about your employer to yourself. If hiring managers see that you're willing to trash a colleague online, they assume you'll do it to them, too. Plus, there's always the possibility of getting fired if someone sees your negative comments. Don't forget, dentistry is a very tight-knit community.

Don't mention your job search if you're still employed. If your employer knows you're on the lookout for a new job, feel free to advertise it in your status in a positive manner. If you're keeping your search below the radar, however, don't publish anything anywhere. Even if you aren't connected to your employer online, somebody can get the information back to him or her.

Lastly, use a search engine to look for online records of yourself to see what is posted out there about you. If you find information you feel could be detrimental to your candidacy or career, see if you can remove it or bury it under positive information. Make sure you have an answer ready to explain any “digital dirt” someone may dig up. It pays to be prepared.

If you are having difficulty finding employment once you graduate and take your required exams, do a reality check on yourself before putting the blame on others. Do you exude a positive attitude to those you meet in person or through social media? A positive attitude can go a long way! ADAA is a networking media in itself and sometimes it’s all about who you know. Get involved and get the inner scoop on what is going on in your profession. Best of luck to all in your studies and employment searches!

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2017-2018 ADAA President