Digital Blind Spots

I have consulted with many professionals about their digital dilemmas. Often they weren't intending to cross the line with their digital behavior, they simply did not see the risk in their digital actions. These professionals were tripped up ethically by the nature of Internet.

The Internet isn't intending to do any harm, it is doing exactly what it was intended to do, connect lots of people by providing access to many people from many different points.

However, because it is so wide open, the public nature of the Internet works against privacy and security.

Here are some of the digital blind spots I have observed.

- *Thinking that delete means gone for good.*

When we post something online it is there forever, perhaps swirling around us in unanticipated way in the future. Snapchat is a good example of this blind spot. This app deletes an image, but the image does not go away for good, that image rests somewhere on a server. Or it lives another person's device as a quick thinking person can take a screen shot to preserve the image. Last, the image can be opened in a hack of Snapchat that preserves the image without notifying the sender that the message they sent has been preserved. Nothing is ever gone for good in the digital world, you post it and it lives somewhere forever.

- *Lack of contextual cues causes misunderstandings that can escalate into larger ethical and legal problems.*

Have you ever read a text that left you scratching your head and wondering what the sender meant? This is the absence of non-verbal and auditory cues at work in the digital world. Digital communications between client and therapist can be more easily misunderstood than we communicate face-to – face. Misinterpreting communication can be harmful to therapeutic relationships.

- *Anonymity means that people act differently in the face-to-face world than in the digital world.*

My experience in the digital world is that people take more risks, are more aggressive, and are generally less civil than they are in the physical world. They become more judgmental, less concerned on the impact that their posts have on others. This false perception of online anonymity makes us susceptible to posting things that we never would have shared face-to-face.

- *Our intended audience is often not the last person to see our posts.*

We can send a message that will be well received by our intended audience, yet how will the post be interpreted if someone forwards it to third parties? People love to curate and repost images and messages, sending them well beyond their intended audience. Will your client think less of you if they are forwarded a message that appears to put you in a negative light?

- *Social media is instant and powerful.*

Social media is great for broadcasting information that we want to get out quickly. What is not so great is that this also means we also lose the ability to "get that post back" if we re-think the wisdom of the post.

- *Ease of posting seduces us into thinking that our communications are private.*

Smartphones can sometimes lead to dumb posts. Technological advances mean that we can literally post anything, anywhere, anytime we want. The law of averages tells us that we can if we post a lot, sooner or later we may post something that we wish we had back. We lose site of the fact that our posts aren't private, as soon as we hit send we are putting it out there all to see.

When you are posting online, you are writing in ink, not pencil. Social media is instant and powerful; make sure that the messages you send on social media mirror the behaviors that your clients see in your office.

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