

## Facebook at Work: Beware the Dangers

Facebook has become an indispensable way to locate old friends, schedule events and even send virtual gifts. But if you're doing more living online than off it might be time to reassess. And if Facebook visits are a part of your standard workday, your productivity can suffer. Even quick visits while you are "on the clock" can add up to substantial theft of services from your employer! Dr. Kimberly Young, Director of Netaddiction.com and author of *Caught in the Net*, (John Wiley & Son's: Available at Amazon.com) the first book to study Internet addiction, offers some suggestions to help determine if Facebook is dragging down your personal and work life.

Dr. Young quotes Rob Bedi, a registered psychologist who says, "This is not something you can quit cold turkey. While a cocaine addict can put down his drug and an alcoholic his drink, you can't preach abstinence to a society that functions on Internet usage. What you can do is practice control." Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Are personal relationships taking a backseat to Facebook?**
- **Do you think about Facebook even when you're offline?**
- **Do you use Facebook to escape problems or responsibilities?**
- **Do you stay on Facebook longer than intended?**
- **Have you ever concealed Facebook use?**

If you answered yes to any, you may be a borderline addict. Frequent Facebook visits actually cause what Dr. Young calls *intermittent reinforcement*. Notifications, messages and invitations reward you

with an unpredictable high, much like gambling. This anticipation can get dangerously addictive. It is an entire world where one can easily be seduced and sucked in. Dr. Young suggests that you keep a log to track your Facebook usage. If you're shocked by what you discover, Dr. Young suggests the following:



- **List your Facebook goals:** Why did you originally sign up? Is your goal to network? Is your goal to have 5,000 "friends?" Are these people you *really* need to keep in touch with?
- **Record what you actually do on Facebook:** How many times do you check status updates of friends? How many notifications do you receive? How much time do you spend on People Search or Classmate Search? Once you see how much time you are actually spending, you will be able to use that as a baseline to moderate your usage.
- **Make a Facebook schedule and adhere to it:** Limit time to maintaining your original goals. Update your e-mail addresses to avoid relying on Facebook messages. Check these only once a day.
- **If you feel you have a problem, there are 155 Facebook Addicts Anonymous groups on Facebook itself that you may wish to join:** However, Dr. Young points out that this might defeat the purpose! It may be more appropriate to simply contact your EAP using the 24-hour toll-free numbers below.
- **Check your employer's policy on personal electronic devices:** More and more organizations are restricting or limiting the use of these so be sure that you are not violating workplace rules.