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FRENCH OPEN TENNIS CAN TEACH EMPLOYERS HOW TO COMBAT CYBERBULLYING: A 4-STEP PLAN

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The organizers of the French Open have adopted a unique approach to protect the competing athletes from cyberbullying and harassment – and the steps they take could teach employers some lessons on how to combat cyberbullying at your own workplace. Professional athletes, much like any public figures, often find themselves the victim of vitriolic online attacks. To remedy this, the French tennis federation has provided the participating athletes with technology to review and block comments posted on their social media that the software considers to be harassing. While software represents but one method of combating cyberbullying, the tournament’s innovative strategy of proactively addressing it should serve as a wake-up call for your organization. What are the four steps you should consider implementing at your workplace?

First Things First: What is Cyberbullying?

To protect their employees from cyberbullying, employers first need to know what it is. While definitions vary, the Cyberbullying Research Center defines cyberbullying as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.”

While its forms are limitless, some common examples include posting harmful or negative content about someone, starting a negative campaign of disparagement, sending someone offensive or threatening emails, “doxing” (which entails publicly sharing identifying information), and many more.

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Cyberbullying can occur on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, but it can also take place via text messaging and messaging apps, e-mail communications, and more. And while it can occur between coworkers, public-facing employees or those charged with managing your social media accounts or external communications can also be victimized by malicious actors online.

Your 4-Step Plan to Address Cyberbullying in the Workplace

Cyberbullying can result in emotional distress, reduced work satisfaction, and poor physical and mental well-being. All that said, there are four steps you can take to protect your employees.

- 1. Use Technology to Your Benefit.** Varied software tools like the ones referenced above can aid in your fight against cyberbullying. A dedicated IT team can also help you deploy the latest creative technology to help in your workplace.
- 2. Develop Modern Policies.** You can also develop your own zero-tolerance policy against cyberbullying – and if you haven't reviewed them recently, you should determine whether they need to be adapted to address any legal and technological developments that have occurred in recent years. Make sure the policy has established reporting and response mechanisms, taking into account employee rights to discuss and share certain information under federal laws and regulations, including the National Labor Relations Act.
- 3. Train Your Workforce.** You must also teach your employees about cyberbullying – what it looks like, how to respond, who to report it to, etc. – so that they can best protect themselves and their coworkers.
- 4. Know Your Legal Rights and Obligations if Cyberbullying Occurs.** In the event of a third party posting false and malicious content relating to public-facing employees, you and your employee may have legal remedies to force the removal of harmful content. The posting of images or other personal content on social media platforms may violate the platforms' terms and conditions in certain circumstances, providing you an opportunity to demand removal of the content. For example, Facebook publishes

Community Standards that protect the dignity of individuals, including the stated expectation “that people will respect the dignity of others and not harass or degrade others.” If you are faced with cyberbullying between or relating to your employees, contact your legal counsel to advise on potential options for addressing the incident.

Conclusion

For further information, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the authors of this Insight, or any attorney on the firm’s [Privacy and Cyber team](#). Fisher Phillips will continue to monitor the progress of any legislation regarding cyberbullying and any developing methods for addressing it and will provide updates as warranted, so make sure that you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips’ Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information direct to your inbox.