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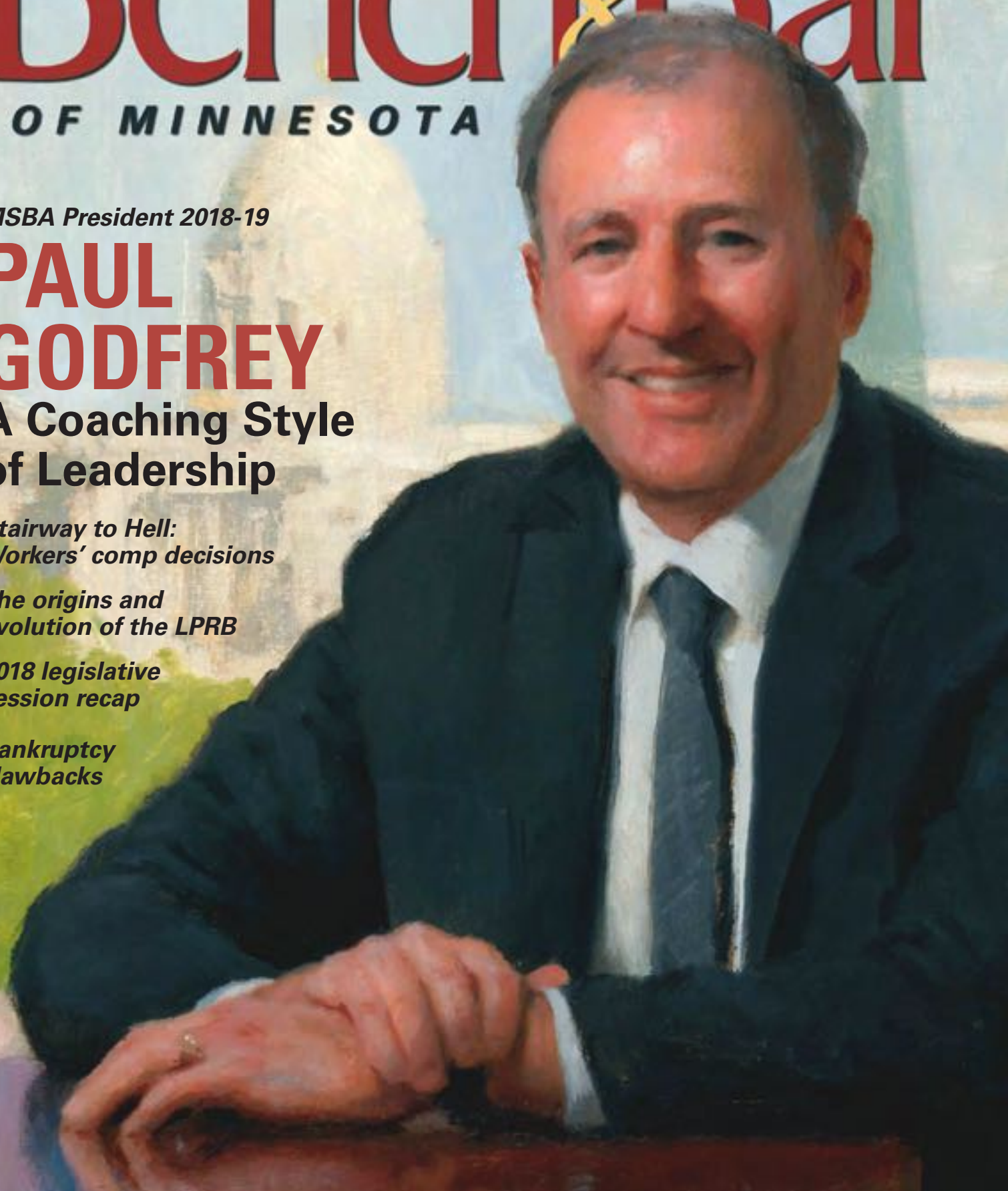
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Social media and managing reputational risk



Recent events involving a certain television show remake and its quick and much-applauded cancellation have me ruminating on the repercussions of social media usage. In today's digital world, many of us feel pressured to keep up with the constant onslaught of information that presents itself to



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us on a minute-by-minute basis. Through any number of social media platforms, people now have free rein to express their opinions on everyone and everything. But this free rein does not mean that one faces no consequences for poor judgments, or that the informal nature of a tweet or post will mitigate the seriousness of the content. While reputational risk is often a difficult-to-quantify

consequence of a data breach, it is also a consequence of our own digital actions.

Social media platforms tend to create the impression that, since the format feels fleeting and unofficial, so too is the content regardless of the sentiment being expressed. Not so. If anything, the speed with which social media allows us to communicate makes for swift and public consequences. ABC's decision to cancel the show in response to Roseanne Barr's offensive tweet was quick and deliberate and left no room for interpretation of her intent or excuses for her behavior (despite her attempts). Furthermore, given how quickly the tweet entered the public sphere, there was no time for anyone on Roseanne's public relations team to adequately respond or preemptively mitigate the damage. While many agree with ABC's prompt decision-making in this instance, the episode also stands as a cautionary tale about expressing oneself on social media. Though we may feel expected to act quickly on the internet, we should never be too hasty to express ourselves, especially not in writing.

It only feels anonymous

Social media is consistently treated as if it were yet another anonymous aspect of the internet. Even within

organizational settings, there is a pervasive and groundless faith that only intended audiences are viewing what you post. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and sometimes LinkedIn are frequently treated as public diaries—where, for whatever reason, users feel entitled to privacy and are affronted when they realize that they are going to be held accountable for their words. Many use “free speech” as an excuse, but free speech does not protect individuals from facing consequences at work, including termination. We have all heard the horror stories about a boss discovering an employee's sick day fib when photos of him or her at a sporting event emerge on Facebook. But there is an entire range of social media-related problems that may include an organization facing blame for an employee's hate speech or racially discriminatory social media rants. In reality, we are hardly anonymous on the internet, and social media platforms give us a potentially very loud and public voice regardless of whether we were seeking one.

Social media ultimately offers little leniency when it comes to inappropriate posting, in spite of its seemingly anonymous and informal nature. When something is in writing, the results of an inappropriate comment being publicly shared online can be swift and long-lasting.

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Recognizing this fact is very important within the legal community, because of course clients and the public expect attorneys and law firms to maintain only the most ethical reputations. As a cybersecurity expert, I most frequently caution people against sharing their personal information online to avoid becoming victims of cybercrime and identity theft. But today it's also extremely important that we all be cautioned against publicly sharing any thoughts or opinions we would not be comfortable sharing with everyone. If you would not want a client, your neighbor, your boss, or a judge to read it, avoid posting it. As representatives of law firms, clients, and the law itself, those within the legal community are held to an even higher standard than other organizations and their employees.

Managing social media presence

It's important that lawyers understand what is expected of them when it comes to managing their social media accounts. This seems to be a frequent point of confusion in the workplace, and with good reason. The distinction between public and private accounts, what is appropriate inside and outside of the physical office space, and what makes for a "bad tweet" all seem to be topics of debate. These topics seem to be particularly divisive among different generations of technology users. Upper management may struggle to appreciate the fact that newer hires have been raised on social media, and thus, it plays a different role in their lives. Trying to control posting may seem too heavy-handed for newer generations in the workforce, yet it remains the case that unchecked social media presence may permanently hurt

an organization's public image.

Ultimately, nothing posted on the internet is ever truly anonymous. While a tweet may be posted and forgotten, the consequences that may follow are frequently long-lasting. Roseanne Barr's tweet cost her the revival of her show, her career, and arguably, her legacy. Social media missteps by attorneys can cause reputational damage to their firms and undermine their credibility with potential clients. Slowing down makes a world of difference when it comes to acting responsibly online. Instead of reacting immediately to the slew of digital information and provocation that's thrown at us every day, take a minute to carefully consider whether what you have to say is valuable and worded respectfully, and whether you would have a problem with any particular person reading it. ▲

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