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WHAT IS SOCIAL ETIQUETTE IN SOCIAL MEDIA?

Each year, students in Penn State's golf course turfgrass management program must complete an etiquette course that culminates in a formal luncheon with faculty, staff and industry professionals. While the norms of social and dining etiquette are formalized in books such as Emily Post's "Etiquette," the uncertainty of etiquette in social media remains somewhat unclear.

At a recent conference presentation, an audience member asked about the proper use of social media and whether it was acceptable to not "follow" someone on Twitter or not accept a "friend request" on Facebook. After considering the question for a minute I realized I actually have some informal guidelines for this issue.

Some of these are hard-and-fast rules and some are just general guidelines to connect (or not connect) with others on social media.

WHY I DON'T "FOLLOW" YOU ON TWITTER.

Twitter is my favorite of all the social media sites and I often get called out for not following certain people within the turfgrass industry. I try to explain to them that just because I wasn't formally "following" them didn't mean I wasn't tracking what they were saying. I routinely check who my followers are and while I don't always follow back, nearly everyone is put on a list. I have lists for "turfgrass," "photography," "Penn State" and even lists for those who I find offensive. I put those deviants on my "Rude and Obnoxious" list. It's private so you don't know who these people are. So although I don't formally follow some of you, I often use applications like Tweetdeck to follow my "lists." Despite this organization, I still maintain some reasoning for dropping or not following you in the first place. Here are some key reasons:

- You don't have a profile picture. If

you can't take the time to upload a profile picture then you don't deserve to be followed.

- You don't tweet. There are plenty of "lurkers" out there and I encourage this, but if you don't say anything then there is no point in following you.

- You're inactive. I routinely check the activity of those that I follow and if you haven't tweeted anything in 2-3 months then you're out.

- You tweet too much all at once. I follow over 1,200 people on Twitter so this is a hard rule to break for my followers, but if I see five tweets in a row on my stream all from one person then I don't have time to deal with you.

- You've been hacked. Accounts are hacked all the time and if you send me some spam via a direct message then I am sorry to say, you have to go.

HOW TO "CONNECT" ON LINKEDIN.

This is a growing issue for me. I don't use LinkedIn all that much, but I do find it's the best professional social networking site out there. I frequently get requests on LinkedIn and many of them sit in the queue awaiting a decision. Since I find LinkedIn useful for professionals, I have rules for "connecting" with people there as well.

- You don't have a profile pic. See reasoning above for Twitter.
- You are not in the turfgrass industry. I have college friends trying to connect with me all the time. I send them a message and politely inform them that I use LinkedIn for professional connections only. I then direct them to my Facebook page.

- You don't include a personal message in your invitation to connect. While this isn't essential, if someone I don't know writes a personal message about why we should be connected I almost always accept.

- You're too commercial. If it's

clear your purpose is to sell or promote things, I will not likely follow you. We all have jobs and we all promote something, but I don't like it thrown in my face. Build yourself a "business page" and if I'm interested I will follow it.

SURE. WE CAN BE "FRIENDS" ON FACEBOOK.

I accept just about everyone on Facebook, but occasionally people do not make the cut. If you don't make the grade it's probably because I can't figure out who you are or even if you're in the turf industry at all. Put a little effort into your profile to let me know that you are or plan to be a golf course superintendent and you'll likely get in.

One rule I do have is I WILL NOT be "friends" with anyone who has an account setup as a business or entity. Businesses should have "fan pages" and not setup their personal profile account as anything other than themselves. My one exception is "Poa annua." Whoever that person is (and it's not me), I find the concept comical.

MY SOCIAL MEDIA. MY RULES.

So after reading this you may be thinking, "This guy's a real jerk." That may be the case (reread my intro in my inaugural column in the February issue), but basically I have to make some sense of all of the information being thrown at me. After all, these are MY social media profiles and MY guidelines.

Trust me, I encourage people to "unfollow" or "unfriend" me all the time. Not everyone likes to see my tweets about "checking in" to Starbucks every morning. I accept this and encourage people to come up with their own list of rules that will bring order to their social media life. If I don't make the cut, I won't be offended.

Do you have rules of your own that I didn't mention above? If so, tweet them to me at [@JohnKaminski](https://twitter.com/JohnKaminski). **GCI**