

## Protect Your Reputation at All Costs

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

*"A risk to reputation is a threat to the survival of the enterprise."*

-Peter J. Firestein

I read an article once about Blackstone executive David Blitzer, whose father-in-law he once charged with trying to shake him down for \$7.5 million. The man was ultimately arrested after Blitzer, 38, made a \$500,000 payment as part of a deal to get the harassment to stop. Blitzer's father-in-law had originally requested that Blitzer loan him money, which Blitzer did. However, when Blitzer refused to relinquish more money than originally requested, things turned ugly. According to the article:

In June, Ross demanded more money and began harassing Blitzer with phone calls and emails, according to the district attorney's office. Ross allegedly said if Blitzer did not give him at least an additional \$50,000, Ross would contact Blackstone executives and [law enforcement](#) with accusations he said would ruin Blitzer's career.

In one voicemail message, Ross threatened to "commit open warfare" against Blitzer if he didn't send money, the district attorney's office says.

When I read that article, a family member was attacking me in a similar way, after I'd refused to give that person a loan. The difference between what happened to me and the situation with Blitzer was the "open warfare" against me had already begun. The attacks had been going on for some time, in fact. When my relative denied the attacks, I asked him to take a lie detector test, which he took and failed.

While I cannot comment on this further, I will say you must protect your reputation at all costs from public defamation. Don't let yourself become a victim.

Being attacked by my relative was one of the hardest things I have ever dealt with. A situation like this really goes to the core of who you are, and it causes damage in many ways. People have asked me why someone would make accusations against me if they were not true. My reputation has been tainted. The problems the ordeal caused me, my family, and even my employees are completely unacceptable.

During your career, you cannot afford to take any chances with what people say about you. Never let lies be spread about you. Before [becoming the CEO](#) of the employment companies I work for now, most of my experience was in the legal industry. I worked in Los Angeles and saw several attorneys' careers destroyed by rumors. While some of the rumors I heard were in fact true, most were not--and the results for the attorneys were catastrophic. Even in a market as large as Los Angeles, word got around very quickly. If you think there are rumors going around about you, you need to react quickly to stop them. The only fight you're guaranteed to lose is the one you back down from.

When you are [searching for a job](#), you need to be aware your potential employers will do their homework on you. They will put your name into a search engine and look you up on social networking sites to see what they can find out about you. If you have a blog, your potential employer will look this up as well. If the people you associate with on your blog do not meet your potential employer's approval (e.g., they are into "weird stuff"), this may cause him or her to lose interest in your candidacy. You must ensure you are protecting your reputation and controlling what others can find out about you.

I once heard someone say something I believe is very appropriate regarding professional reputations: "Never tell people you work with your biggest weaknesses because this is something that can be used against you in the future. Your weaknesses are something that gives others power over you." While this advice may sound extreme, the point is to protect yourself. You do not want people spreading negative information about you in the workplace. This can not only cause problems with your current job but can also potentially damage your future employment prospects. There is no quicker way to hurt your career (especially in niche professions where a lot of people know each other) than to allow rumors to circulate about you.

The best way to deal with rumors is often to acknowledge they exist and then do your best to address them. Addressing rumors is an excellent way to ensure that whatever is behind them is not allowed to fester. For example, the Coca-Cola Company has an entire portion of its website dedicated to addressing false rumors. This is a priority for large companies such as Coca-Cola, and it should be a priority in your career as well.

In my opinion, one of the best ways to overcome your critics is to simply sit down and speak with the people you believe are creating the rumors. This can be challenging to do in a professional environment, but when done properly, it can put the people on notice about your concern and let them know you may suspect their own behaviors. Getting close to these people--keeping your enemies close--is often the best way to help quiet them.

When I was in high school, I remember another football player spreading rumors about me and a girl in our school, with whom I'd never even spoken. I walked up to the player the day I heard the rumor and asked him, "What exactly makes you feel good about spreading rumors about this girl and me?" I never heard the rumor again. Later, I heard he denied ever saying it.

In summary, if you hope to continue to grow your career, you must confront rumors early on in order to prevent them from growing and festering. Protect your professional reputation at all costs, act with honor and don't let petty talk from other people stand in the way of your progress.

### THE LESSON

Protect your reputation at all costs, and do not let false rumors or information about you to stand uncorrected. You do not want people to spread negative information about you in the workplace; not only can such rumors impact your current job,

but also your future employment prospects. Negative rumors must be stopped as soon as you become aware of them.

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