It isn't hard to ruin your reputation online these days--blogging about your boss, Twittering about your customers, posting Facebook pictures that involve copious amounts of alcohol and otherwise inappropriate props. But there's a danger in all of the conversations and lessons about online etiquette: Forgetting that most reputations are made or lost in the office.

While some workers make big, reputation-destroying mistakes (think plagiarism or sexual harassment), the vast majority make a series of choices that can quietly build or ruin their professional image in the workplace. "What I find is that most people undermine their credibility in little ways and they do it because they don't mind their '-ilities,'" says Emily Bennington, coauthor of *Effective Immediately: How to Fit In, Stand Out, and Move Up at Your First Real Job*. Think punctuality, dependability, humility, accountability. "It's not so much that they make these major mistakes ... What they do is that they slowly chip away at it."

Careful Communications: E-mail is a sensitive area. These typed communiqués can easily impress groups of colleagues with a worker's communication skills, or lack thereof. "Reputations get destroyed by this so frequently," says Sandy Allgeier, author of *The Personal Credibility Factor: How to Get It, Keep It, and Get It Back (If You've Lost It)*. For one thing, E-mail reveals a worker's sensitivity to the office culture and others' time. If you're frequently cc'd on mail that has no bearing on your work, you may begin to doubt the sender's discernment.

Then there's the ominous "reply all." Everyone knows the accidental office-wide reply can be devastating, but there's plenty of harm in the intentional "reply all." An E-mail reply that's terse, caustic, or cryptic might make sense to a single recipient who knows the writer well, but it rarely translates to a broad audience. Replies that are driven by organizational tensions or are an emotional reaction can be particularly dangerous. E-mail generally seems like a quick way to communicate to a broad group, "but it can become the most inefficient thing in the world," Allgeier says. Large-audience E-mails are rarely wise for dealing with a controversial issue or for being humorous. A regular habit of insensitive, unwise digital communications can leave coworkers with a negative impression that's "almost irreversible," Allgeier says.

How To Ruin Your Work Reputation Slowly
Liz Wolgemuth
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In The Public Eye: Meetings are another danger zone. New hires are often eager to look good among more experienced colleagues, so they're quick to raise a hand when there's an opportunity. Younger workers who are ambitious and want to be seen as contributors can have quick responses that are not helpful, Allgeier says. Better qualities to display: attentiveness and inquisitiveness. "You should really be feeling free to ask more questions," she adds. "This is especially true of people who are trying to make their mark." Young professionals sometimes feel that they will be judged if they've sat through a meeting without saying anything, Bennington notes. But a contribution needs to have a strong basis and foundation to be useful. "Sometimes you can be too eager," she says.

Similarly, employees who interrupt their boss or embarrass their boss in a meeting will quickly chip away at their reputations. "Make sure you understand the rules of behavior," says Roy Cohen, an executive coach in New York. "That's critical." It's crucial to have your boss's back when you're in a public setting. Even then, your loyalty should come across as thoughtful, not blind.

Relationships: It's easy for professionals to get caught up in their relationships with managers. For many, this is the most important factor in whether a job is worth sticking with. The downside of constantly nurturing your relationship with your boss is its effect on your relationships with coworkers. "I've noticed that new professionals coming into the workforce don't appreciate that their success is as dependent upon colleagues as it is upon their boss," Bennington

says. When they have impressed their managers enough to get promoted, these workers often find that the colleagues they've jockeyed for position don't want to work under them. The promoted workers become lone rangers. "I think it's human nature that we want to be superstars and we want to be the best," Bennington says. "It's wonderful to have high expectations for yourself, but it can't come at the expense of the team."

Relationships are critical to actually establishing a reputation for yourself. Indeed, the only thing worse than a bad reputation is no reputation. Some professionals become generic. "They don't stand for anything in the workforce," Bennington says. "It's not so much that they've damaged their reputation, it's that they don't have one at all." Cohen, who's a master coach for the Five O'Clock Club and author of the upcoming book *The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide*, says that workers can under-socialize. "There's a sense that if I work really hard, the work will speak for itself," Cohen says. Much of the time, it won't.

First and foremost, Cohen notes, people need to know what it takes to keep a reputation intact. "Then you know what could potentially damage it," he says.