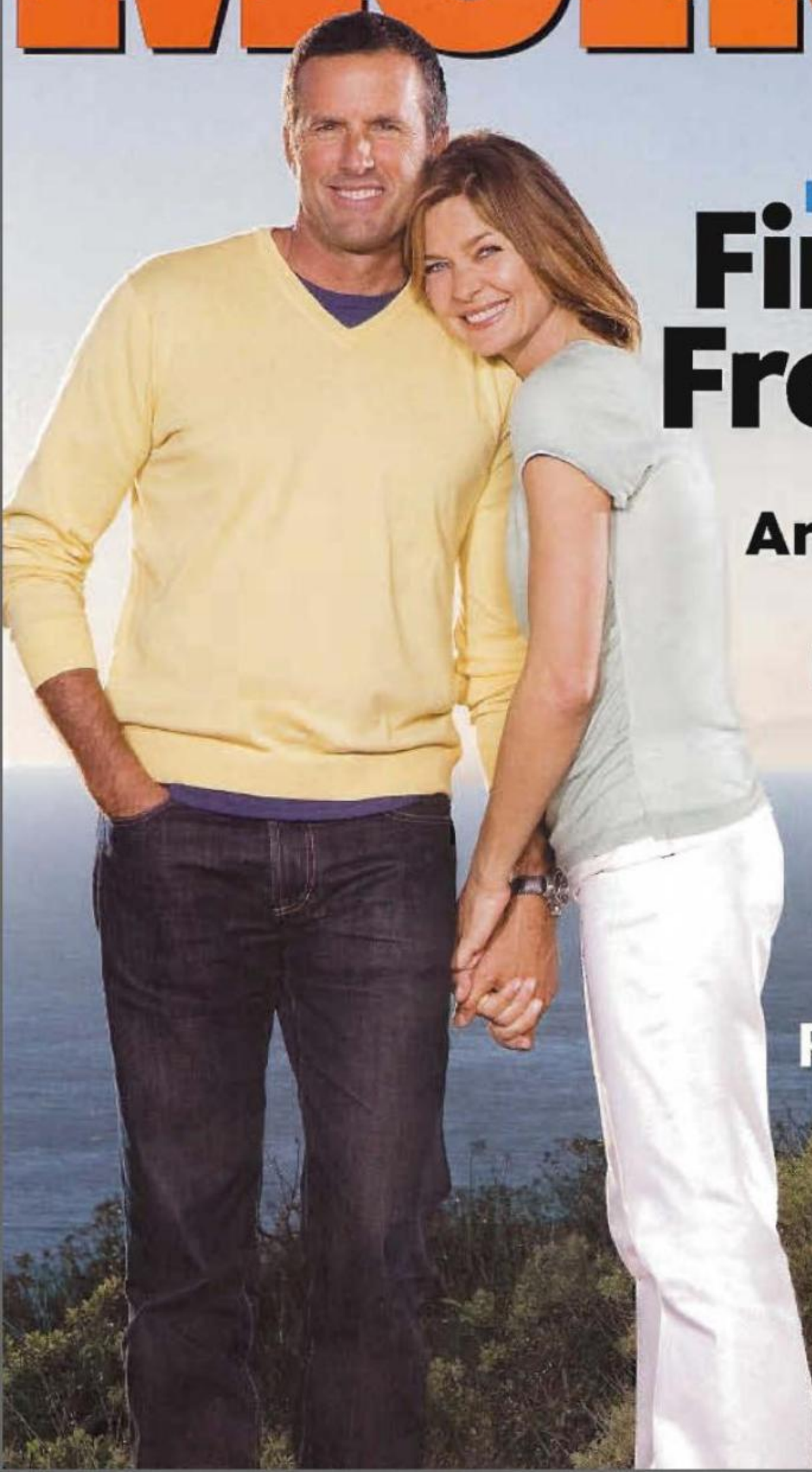


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Building Character

You are your online reputation, warns law professor **Daniel Solove**—and you'll have to do all you can to manage it if you want to protect your career **INTERVIEW BY JOE LIGHT**

➤ Hiring managers are increasingly using the Web as a supplement to your paper résumé, creating a sort of unauthorized biography pieced together from all the references to you on the Internet. Problem is, you write your résumé, while your profile online is a collaborative property written by many.

Other people, some of them complete strangers, mention you on their blogs, publish your marathon results on local websites, tag you in photos on Facebook, upload YouTube videos in which you appear. And the stuff they post—true, untrue, embarrassing, upsetting or misleading—becomes part of a permanent worldwide record that can have a devastating career impact, says Daniel Solove, a law professor at George Washington University and author of the book *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet*. A noted privacy expert, Solove thinks the courts need to do more to protect what is essentially personal property. But until there's a shift in the legal system, he says, it's wise to get to know your digital doppelgänger and do all that you can to put the best possible face on it.

Q. How is the Internet transforming reputation and gossip?

A. Well, when reputation was just oral, you could do something stupid and it'd soon be forgotten. Now negative information is more permanent—if it's gone "viral," it's practically impossible to erase, even if you get the original poster to take it down. And it's less localized. You could move to Australia, but someone there could Google you and find it. As a result, second chances are a lot more rare.

Q. Sounds like a career killer.

A. It can be. These days you can pretty much expect that a potential employer will run a Web search on you. The catch is that you don't know if what's online will be the thing that kills your application. But worse, you're not in control of what's posted. A few years ago, for example, a woman famously blogged intimate details of her dating relationship with a co-worker. When he was exposed, the man's professional reputation was tarnished through no fault of his own.

Q. So how do we keep such things from ending up online?

A. There's little you can do pre-emptively beyond making social-networking profiles viewable only to friends. After that, it's about knowing what's out there and trying to contain it. Google yourself, and if you don't like something you see, ask the site's Webmaster to take it down. Or hire a service like ReputationDefender.com, which fights negative content for you. At the least, be ready to address anything controversial in a job interview.

Q. Can't you sue?

A. Judges take a narrow view on privacy and often strike down suits on the basis of the First Amendment. But the harm some rumors cause outweighs the benefit of free speech in such situations. If the courts let more of these cases proceed, the threat of legal action would be more credible. People would have incentive to be responsible. If judges don't change their minds, the law should change. One I'd look at is the federal statute that immunizes Webmasters from responsibility for user-posted content. **\$**