

## How being a Karen can damage your career

Karen Gately admits she found the initial memes involving her name quite hilarious, but she wonders if the joke has gone too far.

"For the Karens of the world, clearly it's quite offensive. I know a lot of Karens who are feeling quite challenged at the disrespect of using our names to describe behaviours that are really ordinary," said the HR specialist and founder of Corporate Dojo, whose name is pronounced "Car in".



Karen Gately said people's professional reputations can be severely damaged by viral videos.

The moniker has dominated headlines this week after a video involving a [woman later identified as Kerry Nash who refused to wear a mask at a Bunnings store](#) in Melbourne's south-east went viral.

Before long, the woman was outed as a former iSelect employee on social media. After being tagged in several tweets, the company responded that the Melbourne woman had not worked for iSelect since December 2018 and condemned her behaviour in a tweet.



**Michael Bassett** @ImWithoutADoubt · Jul 27, 2020



Kerry Nash aka #Bunnings #Karen, todays dickhead of the day.

Congrats @iSelect, you've hit the jackpot with her.

#COVID19Vic #COVIDiots



**Kerry Nash · 3rd**

Senior Sales Consultant Iselect

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### About

Experienced Senior Sales Consultant with a demonstrated history of working in the consumer services industry. Skilled in Contact Centers,



**iSelect**

@iselect

Kerry Nash has not worked for iSelect since Dec '18. We are appalled by #BunningsKaren's refusal to wear a mask without disclosing a legitimate reason. We fully comply with COVID restrictions & any staff unable to WFH must wear a mask in our office, in accordance with guidelines

4:13 PM · Jul 27, 2020



281



See the latest COVID-19 information on Twitter

At a time when racial and social issues such as Black Lives Matter and the LGBTIQ issues are driving public debate, the backlash from viral videos is often swift and far-reaching, especially for those in the eye of "Karen" storm.

Earlier this year, Amy Cooper, who was dubbed Central Park Karen, was [fired from her role at finance firm Franklin Templeton](#) after she was filmed calling police on a African American man bird-watching, while [Tennessee woman Sonya Holt also lost her job](#) after she was filmed at a rally earlier this month saying "white lives matter, white lives are better".





**Melody Cooper**  
@melodyMcooper



Oh, when Karens take a walk with their dogs off leash in the famous Bramble in NY's Central Park, where it is clearly posted on signs that dogs MUST be leashed at all times, and someone like my brother (an avid birder) politely asks her to put her dog on the leash.



3:03 AM · May 26, 2020



529.1K 205.5K people are Tweeting about this

**Robert Larkin was fired from his role at financial services firm Raymond James after he and his wife called police on a man who was stencilling Black Lives Matter on his own property in San Francisco in June.**



Experts say Australia's employment laws are very different from the US where the vast majority of such sackings occur.

In an age where reputational risk is top of mind for many companies, viral videos and bad behaviour can nevertheless have incredibly damaging consequences on a person's career and job prospects, even decades on.

"The rise of social media has meant that any public bad behaviour can, and most likely will, go viral," said Sarah McCann-Bartlett, chief executive of the Australian HR Institute.

"Because of the accessibility of information online, a badly behaved employee is likely to be linked to their employer which in turn can damage the organisation's brand and reputation even if that behaviour was displayed outside of work."

## Damaged goods

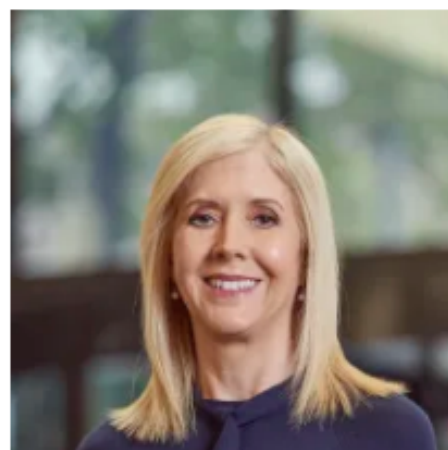
Ms Gately and Greg Weiss, founder and director of Career365, agree.

Mr Weiss said: "Management is going to look at somebody who behaves in a rogue manner [outside of work] and say 'does this person pose a [reputational risk](#) to us?'"

Ms Gately said: "Everybody googles nowadays so that stuff definitely sticks.

"People do these things and then we crucify them and their ability to recover their professional and personal reputation can obviously be seriously at risk."

Mr Weiss pointed to the case of a senior executive who was still paying the price a decade after they were dogged by bad publicity which had "tainted every individual step in moving forward".



Public bad behaviour can, and most likely will, go viral warns Sarah McCann-Bartlett.

Professionals also need to be aware of how social media posts can taint them in the eyes of potential employers.

"So if a 'Karen' is identified, it comes down to the values and the risk profile that potential employer has in deciding whether they're going to take on such an individual," Mr Weiss said.

People should never assume content on their social media platforms is private, warned Ms McCann-Bartlett.

"If you post something on your Facebook or locked Instagram, what you're doing is trusting everybody else on your network not to share that," she said.

The notoriety from a viral video can be a very high price to pay as the people involved are often vilified and pilloried online.

"All of these people are being piled onto because they've behaved badly ... I really do fear for their mental health and safety," Ms Gately said.



**Natasha Boddy** is Work & Careers reporter with The Australian Financial Review. She was previously a homepage editor and online producer. *Connect with Natasha on [Twitter](#). Email Natasha at [natasha.boddy@afr.com](mailto:natasha.boddy@afr.com)*



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