

Job Searching Is Not Just for the Unemployed

I know, I know... in this time of unemployment, anyone without a job will look at this article and (sarcastically) say "yea, thanks a lot for the help, David." I understand.

But truthfully, there is a lot of merit to what I am about to write, and those of you who are employed should take note, even if you like your job and really haven't thought about leaving.

In my career as a [staffing specialist](#), I have learned quite a bit about both what makes an ideal job candidate, and also what employers are *really* looking for. I put "really" in italics, because what employers want often goes beyond what is on a resume. All else being equal, employers want someone skilled enough to hold onto their job. That might be an unfair dig at people unemployed (indeed, many people without a job got that way through no real fault of their own), but I'm not interested in fluff – I'm interested in fact. And the cold hard fact is that if there are two candidates equal in every way except current employment, the employed candidate is more attractive than the unemployed one.

But let's also look at this from the employee side. Most skilled employees are "at will" employees, meaning they can (generally) be terminated at any time, for almost any reason. Just knowing that that can happen should be enough to prompt employees to at least keep an iron in the fire.

But even more so than that, look at the big picture – leaving a job (either by your own will or by the company letting you go) without a plan could lead to a large gap in your resume. And gaps matter (don't let fluff-laden articles tell you different.) Most people are going to change jobs several times in their careers – so it is best to do so on YOUR terms. Make no mistake - the best people are *always* "looking". To borrow a phrase, "hey, you never know". Plus (as all salespeople know), when you *really* need something, it shows. A starving salesperson is so desperate for a sale that it affects his or her performance. And when you *really* need a job, it comes across, and almost never in a positive manner.

In the staffing world, we even have a term for these employed job-seekers. We call them "[Passive Candidates](#)", and they are the most desirable candidates out there. Employers sometimes *only* deal with staffing firms, because they are so enamored with getting a solid passive candidate (see, employers know the best passive candidates are clever enough NOT to post their jobs on huge employment websites.)

Ok, so you want to be a passive candidate. Good – here are a few do's and don'ts for you.

- Do not post your resume on job boards. When you do this your information is spread across the entire internet, and many firms pull resumes off of internet databases and enter them into their own proprietary databases. This means that years from now your information will be used (without your consent) by hundreds or thousands of sites, cut-rate staffing firms, etc. Plus, no matter how hard you may try to hide yourself, your own employer might see you (oops.)
- You *definitely* want to find a reputable [Staffing Firm](#) that specializes in your particular field. Forget "all in one" places that will make you "candidate 1,532 out of 5,000".

Instead, find a smaller staffing firm that specializes in what YOU do. Many solid companies use these types of Staffing Firms exclusively, since they prefer to focus on their business and not on sorting through thousands of resumes. Plus, they know that these Staffing Firms send them ideal "passive" candidates that are a perfect fit for their particular openings.

- When you do leave your current position, ALWAYS leave on good terms. If you worked for a company for 10 years, and then leave without giving sufficient notice, make a "Jerry McGuire" type scene prior to departing, take company property with you (like when Jerry took the fish), you basically flush away ten years of your life. Yes, I know many firms do not give negative references, but most will always give a positive one (meaning that a neutral reference is really a bad reference.) Again, I'm going against the "fluff" that's out there and telling you that references and testimonials *do* matter.
- Continuing on the above, a standard notice is two weeks, but it really depends on your position. If you are in a more senior position, a month (or even perhaps two months) will show that you appreciate them and do not have any malicious intent by leaving them with your position vacant. Really good employees – the cream of the crop – always leave things better than they found them.
- Definitely make sure you "Social Network". This means signing up to popular social networking mediums such as [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#). These are powerful, powerful tools that will give you more access to the professional world, and gives those individuals access to you as well. Unlike job boards, all of your contact information is not made public, and correspondence needs to be done before an employer or staffing firm can collect your information and add it into their own personal database (as opposed to 20,000 databases when you are "out there".) Some other social networking sites that I recommend are Friendster and Xing, or you can always start a blog on [WordPress](#) or [Blogger](#).
- Now, while I am on the Facebook thing, I do have to stress one point where I agree with many of the "fluff" articles – do yourself a favor and keep your Facebook profile clean and sane. This means no college (or last week) pictures of you with the beer bong. It also means maybe deleting that friend who posts expletive-filled rants on the government. I'm not saying you have to be a robotic boy (or girl) scout, but let's not make a potential employer wonder, even for a second.

To wrap this up, searching for a job while you already have one is easily the best way to ensure that your employment goals are always current, and will actually make your search that much easier. If at all possible, be a passive candidate – in many cases it will absolutely make a difference.

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