



How To Conduct A Confidential Job Search (How to Make Sure Your Boss Doesn't Know You're Looking)

One of the best times to look for a new job is when you already have a job. Currently employed jobseekers are perceived to be more desirable by some hiring managers than unemployed jobseekers. Some companies even state in their job postings “Must be currently employed,” although some states have banned that practice in recent years.

Looking for a job when you have a job also provides financial benefits. Investing \$1,000-\$2,000 on having your résumé and LinkedIn profile updated by a professional résumé writer and buying new interview attire is easier when you have a current salary to draw on.

Yet there are drawbacks to searching for a new job while you're still in your old one. The biggest concern is if your current employer finds out you're looking. Some bosses consider this “disloyal” behavior, even if they themselves would have no issue with poaching a candidate from a competitor.

A few companies have internal or unwritten policies that an employee who is discovered to be looking for a new job should be replaced “sooner rather than later,” rather than be stuck having to quickly fill a key position when the employee's two-week notice is given. For this reason, if your job search is discovered, the company may start looking to replace you, even if you haven't announced you're looking, much less leaving.

Consequently, there are some specific strategies you should use when conducting a confidential job search.

HOW *NOT* TO GET NOTICED ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is the top social networking site for passive candidates who want to be found. But simply having a LinkedIn profile might draw suspicion that you're looking for a job, so you want to be careful how you use the site.

First, find out what your current company's policy is about LinkedIn. If there isn't one, consider approaching your boss about the strategic value of company employees having a presence on the social networking site — for business reasons — because, as LinkedIn itself points out, “Just because you use LinkedIn doesn't mean you're looking for a job. Many people use LinkedIn to keep in contact with others and help them succeed in their current position.”

Your company may even encourage development of your LinkedIn profile. Some reasons your company may support employees being involved on LinkedIn include:

- It makes the company profile more robust to have current employees affiliated with the company on LinkedIn.
- So that employees can connect with potential customers.
- Because employees can demonstrate thought leadership and expert positioning for the company through involvement in LinkedIn Groups related to the company's work.

- To help the company connect with potential employees who may reach out to current employees through LinkedIn.

However, even if your company supports your involvement on LinkedIn for business purposes, you still want to limit your perception as an active jobseeker (vs. being seen as an active business professional). And make sure you update your LinkedIn profile gradually, if possible. Adding lots of information and connections all at once can look suspicious.

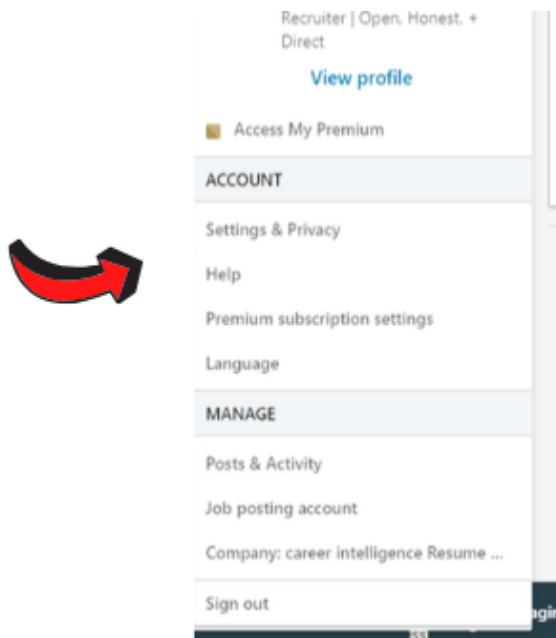
Here are some specific actions you should take on LinkedIn to support your stealth job search, while still being visible for business connections and to facilitate unsolicited job opportunities:

Turn off your activity broadcasts. This is the first step to take, as it will ensure that your entire network isn't notified every time you make a change to your profile. If you don't turn off this setting, all of your Connections will receive notifications of every change you make to your LinkedIn profile.

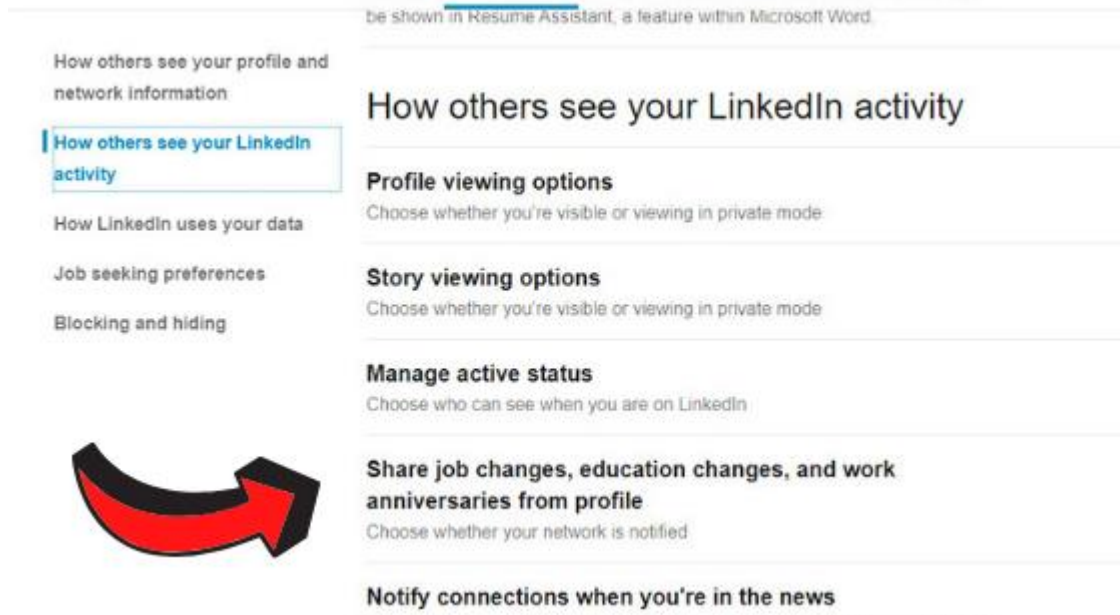
On the main menu, click on the arrow beneath the thumbnail of your profile photo (which appears at the very top right of your profile, on the main menu bar).



From the drop-down menu, click on Settings & Privacy.

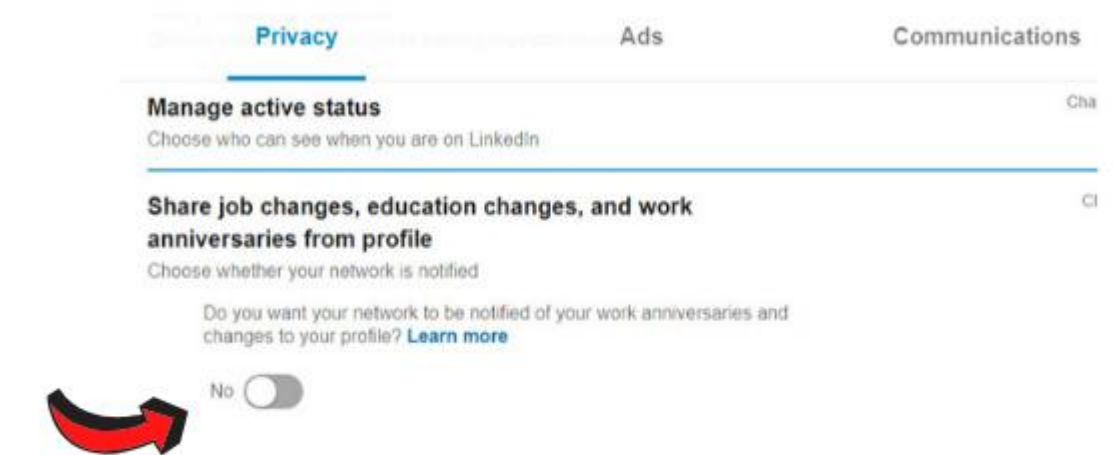


Once on the Settings & Privacy screen scroll down to How others see your LinkedIn Activity. Click on Share job changes, education changes, and work anniversaries from profile. (Choose whether your network is notified.)



The screenshot shows the LinkedIn Settings & Privacy page. On the left is a navigation menu with options: 'How others see your profile and network information', 'How others see your LinkedIn activity' (highlighted with a red arrow), 'How LinkedIn uses your data', 'Job seeking preferences', and 'Blocking and hiding'. The main content area is titled 'How others see your LinkedIn activity' and includes sections for 'Profile viewing options', 'Story viewing options', 'Manage active status', 'Share job changes, education changes, and work anniversaries from profile' (with a red arrow pointing to it), and 'Notify connections when you're in the news'. A red arrow also points to the 'How others see your LinkedIn activity' menu item.

Click on Share job changes, education changes, and work anniversaries from profile. (Choose whether your network is notified.) Set the tab to No.



The screenshot shows the 'Privacy' tab of the LinkedIn Settings & Privacy page. The 'Share job changes, education changes, and work anniversaries from profile' section is selected. Below the title, it asks 'Do you want your network to be notified of your work anniversaries and changes to your profile?' with a 'Learn more' link. A red arrow points to the 'No' radio button, which is selected. A toggle switch is also visible, currently in the 'off' position.

LinkedIn automatically saves your selection. You don't need to do anything else.

Select who can see your connections. The choices are: *Your Connections* or *Only You*. Who you know is actually valuable information for future employers who are considering hiring you or searching for you on LinkedIn, so leave this as “Your Connections.”

Manage your Recommendations. Cultivate these over time — suddenly adding several Recommendations at once may raise suspicion. So request Recommendations over a period of time (for example, one per month), so that they appear to be more organically cultivated.

Don’t reveal confidential information on your LinkedIn profile. You want to quantify accomplishments, but not disclose company secrets. Focus on how you’ve helped the company stand out and be successful, not how *you* stand out and are successful.

Don’t participate in LinkedIn Groups for jobseekers while you’re employed. Instead, participate in LinkedIn Groups where you might be *found* by recruiters or future employers. Contribute your expertise (and carefully considered comments) in job function-specific or industry Groups.

Build your network of contacts slowly. Do not send out multiple connection requests within a short period of time. If your number of connections jumps from 20 to 120 in just days, that’s suspicious to anyone who might be checking out your profile. (However, you definitely want to get your connection number above 100. But do it over a period of time, not all at once.)

Do not use LinkedIn’s profile blocking feature to minimize your LinkedIn visibility to your current boss or colleagues. This will only raise red flags if they know you have a LinkedIn profile but can’t access it. (They can simply ask a friend or colleague to log into their own LinkedIn account and pull up your LinkedIn profile)

OTHER DON'TS TO CONSIDER IN A CONFIDENTIAL JOB SEARCH

Don’t attend job fairs. One jobseeker reviewed the roster of participating employers at a job fair and didn’t see his company listed. However, as he made the rounds of the booths, his current boss spotted him, leading to an awkward conversation and his departure from the company sooner than he had originally planned. Some job fairs collect résumés and distribute them to all participating companies. A few companies enter these into a database to search for their company name to identify current employees looking for new jobs.

Don’t respond to “blind ads.” On a related note, do not submit your résumé for positions where the company name isn’t listed. More than one jobseeker has applied for “the perfect job” only to find it was their job being advertised!

Don’t conduct your job search at work or on company time. This includes not making calls from your work phone or on your company cell phone, or listing either of these numbers on your résumé. You may still receive incoming calls from recruiters and prospective employers on your work landline or cell phone, but you don’t want a record of you initiating these contacts using company resources.

Only make calls at work when you’re on break or at lunch — again, from your personal cell phone. (If you take an early or late lunch, you’re more likely to catch the hiring manager or recruiter at his or her desk.) And make sure you make the call from somewhere you won’t be overheard.

Don’t use your company computer for your job search. First, your search history is trackable, and all your inbound and outbound emails are probably logged as well. Don’t store your résumé on your work computer, and do not use company printers or copiers to make copies of your résumé. It might be overkill, but also don’t connect

to your company's Wi-Fi — even when you're conducting job search activities on your own time, using your own devices.

Don't use your company email address on any of your job search correspondence. Again, not only is it probably being monitored, but also it looks bad to a prospective employer that you are using company resources to support your job search.

Don't post your résumé online. Not only is it likely to be found by someone at your current company, but also résumés posted publicly stay out there “forever.” Even removing contact information might not help you from being identified. When possible, apply only for positions you're interested in, and apply directly on the company website, if possible, instead of through a job board.

Don't schedule interviews during work hours. Schedule your interviews on your day off, before work, during lunch, or after work. You may have to be creative about when — and how — you interview.

Don't post about your job search on social media. Also, don't post about being unhappy in your current job on social media — no matter how locked down you think your privacy settings are. Anyone can take a screen shot of your post and share it with anyone else.

Don't suddenly start attending lots of networking events if you haven't regularly attended them before. However, if you do want to attend professional association or networking events, volunteer to help at the registration desk. You'll get a chance to meet everyone who attends, without appearing that you're trying to meet everyone.

Don't lie if you are asked if you're looking for a job. That's especially important if that question comes from your current boss. If you're asked, be honest — but you should also re-double your job search efforts. In the event of a layoff, you'll likely be the first to be let go, “since you were planning on leaving anyway.”

CONFIDENTIAL JOB SEARCH “DOS”

Do be careful who you tell. If you tell anyone you're looking for a new job, let them know you're looking for a job in confidence. Be especially careful about telling co-workers, as a colleague might accidentally let it slip that you're searching for a new job — or they may see you as disloyal. If you do tell a co-worker, make it clear you don't expect them to cover for you — you don't want them to lose their job because of you!

Do let any recruiters you're working with know you're conducting a confidential job search. Ask to be informed before you are submitted as a candidate to a company. You might know your boss is friends with that company's hiring manager — but the recruiter might not. Better safe than sorry.

Do tell your prospective employer you are conducting your job search in confidence. Also, don't list current co-workers or supervisors as references.

Do set up a free (“generic”) Gmail or Yahoo email account. Make sure you don't include your name or any other personally identifying information — and also make sure it's not a “cutesy” email address either.

Do consider creating “confidential” version of your résumé to post online and submit to blind ads on job boards. Put “Confidential Candidate” as a title at the top. Remove your name and contact information — except for your generic email address and personal cell phone number. (Don't put your home phone number on a confidential résumé — a reverse phone number lookup may reveal your identity.) Don't include your current employer's actual company name — instead, provide a generic description of what the company does. Remove

the dates from your education section — having your degree, school, and year makes you easier to identify. Don't include your name in the file name when saving your résumé. And make sure you check the "Properties" box in Microsoft Word under the File menu to make sure your name and contact information doesn't appear there.

Do watch what you wear. If you typically work in a "business casual" environment, if you show up in a suit (because you have an interview over lunch), that will likely arouse suspicion. One way to avoid raising red flags is to gradually upgrade your wardrobe before you begin looking for a new job.

Wear button-down shirts and slacks a few days a week. Work some skirts into your rotation. Start wearing a jacket occasionally, even if it's kept on the back of your chair. If you do need to wear a suit to an interview, plan enough time to change before your interview — preferably not at your current workplace or the company you want to work for.

Also, make changes in your appearance — new haircut, eyeglasses, etc. — gradually. Don't go in on Monday morning with a whole new look.

Do keep up your efforts at work while you conduct your job search. In fact, go above and beyond with what you're doing in your current job. Companies want employees who are committed to their job, not their job search.

When conducting a confidential job search, don't look for a new job, but instead, seek to be found. This means increasing your visibility — look for opportunities to write, speak, volunteer, and advise. Make sure you have a robust LinkedIn profile. Connect with the right people, and opportunities will find you.

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