

5 Tips for Using Linked In During Your Job Search

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Maybe you're considering upgrading your Linked In account from "Basic" to "Job Seeker," which puts a "Job Seeker" badge on your profile. I would counsel against that. Not only does it make you seem more desperate (and therefore less desirable), there are many things you can do to make sure you're making maximal use of your free account. Here are five:

1. **Follow a company.** You will get updates on who in your network moved where. While it's interesting to see who the "New Hires" are, more important is where they came from, as these might point toward openings at their old company. (Note what their new position is to get an idea of a possible career path.) And, of course, the "Recent Departures" list of a company also lets you know of openings.

2. **Mine new contacts for even newer ones.** Every time someone connects to you, look through their list of contacts. View the profiles of the ones that intrigue you and reach out to a few of them. Personalize the message with starters like these:

- "Love your photo [of the person] – did you have it done professionally? I'm looking for a good photographer."
- "Love your photo [of a misty hiking trail in woods] – Did you take it? – Where is it?"
- I see you also have *Cool Careers for Dummies* on your reading list — isn't it a great resource?
- "I see we have 8 shared connections. We must move in the same circles. Let's make it easier and link directly – and let me know if there's anything I can ever do for you."
- "I see we both went to Chaminade University in Hawaii. Not many people have even heard of that school. Let's link, since we're both alumni."

Linked In allows people to put up so much content — slide shows, groups, awards, reading lists, articles, blogs, Twitter streams — it's very easy to find something to connect about.

3. **Connect with highly visible people.** Search on terms like "speaker," "author," "writer," "coach," "trainer" "evangelist," "sales," "keynote," "award-winning," or "expert." These people are often uber-connectors with thousands of connections. When you find one in your field (or a related

one), search for them on the web to find something they've written and send a thoughtful comment or compliment. Make sure it's sincere. If you get a good response, you can follow up with an invitation to connect, but don't pester them if they ignore you. They are very busy people. A visit to their website might reveal that they're going to be speaking near you soon, which would give you an opportunity to connect in person. Recruiters are in their own category; they often have connections in the thousands and knowledge of job openings, but they are also overwhelmed. If you contact them, make sure you give them a good reason to link and try to be memorable.

4. **Connect to "interesting" people.** Search on an *unusual* interest of yours to see who else has it. You might get ideas about career direction or they might be able to give you a job lead. Imagine you're a medical assistant who likes dancing. A search on "flamenco dancer" brought up this title for *one* person: Medical Doctor, Wellness Expert, International Speaker, Life Coach, Author & Flamenco Dancer. You could reach out to say, "Wow, another person in health care who loves flamenco!" It's a long shot, but life is made up of such coincidences.

5. **Leverage even weak links.** I once got an interview by sending a message through Linked In to one of my contacts, whom, truthfully, I was only loosely connected to. Not only was she someone I'd never met in real life, but I'd turned her down for an interview! (I got a job offer elsewhere.) A year after our initial connection, I was job searching again and I noticed she was connected to someone I was targeting. It was gutsy of me to do, but I felt I had nothing to lose, so I contacted her. She *forwarded* my resume and I got the interview.

These strategies should help you expand your reach on Linked In. But you don't have to wait till you're a job seeker to make connections. In fact, it makes more sense to nurture your network *before* you need it. And remember, always follow up and thank people for connecting!

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