

# Enhance Your Career Planning Through Networking and LinkedIn

LinkedIn has become one of the top job searching and career planning tools in the world. Whether you are a first year student, close to graduation, or in the middle of your program, LinkedIn offers many opportunities to learn about the professional world and help in your career planning.

If you are just starting out in LinkedIn, follow these strategies to establish yourself in your professional community:



## **1. Take time to build your profile.**

Your LinkedIn profile is your online resume, so be sure to highlight all your skills and work experience. Employers will frequently look at your LinkedIn profile before calling you in for an interview. If recruiters contact you and you are not close to graduation, add them to your network and reach out to them when you are looking for a job.

## **2. Add alumni from your department and any other professional acquaintances to your network.**

After you add someone to your network, you will see their contacts as well. When you apply for a job, you can check if there is anyone in your network or your contacts' networks at the company. If so, ask to be introduced. Don't be shy, because people are almost always glad to help. Be sure to return the favor in the future by offering to help if they look for a job.

## **3. Join professional LinkedIn groups and participate in discussion boards.**

Professional groups on LinkedIn are a fantastic tool to support your career planning. When you join a professional organization, you will get the opportunity to get in contact with professionals in your field, learn about potential employers and view discussion boards. If you are exploring alternative career paths, consider the following groups: (1) Alternative PhD Careers and (2) PhD Careers Outside Academia.

#### **4. Sign up for job alerts**

Many professional groups have job alerts. Even if graduation is a few years away, alerts will expose you to companies which are hiring as well as types of positions in your field. If you have a few years left in grad school, you may be able to include marketable job skills into your thesis work.

#### **5. Cast yourself in the best light if you are unemployed.**

Examples of your professional headlines if you are unemployed or close to graduation include:

Open to Opportunities in (insert field)

Seeking New Position in (insert field)

Be sure to tailor your profile to appeal to employers. Employers look for specific and practical skills. Job ads will help you to identify which skill sets are valued in your field. Of course, you need to be honest. Companies who are hiring for entry-level positions understand that applicants straight out of school do not have extensive work experience yet.

If you are active job seeker, then daily persistence will be the key to a successful career planning and job searching strategy. Part of your routine will be to monitor online job listings, but a bigger and even more important part will be to follow up with key contacts.

What does it mean to follow up? One of the most important things to keep in mind about networking is that it is a two-way street. While you are still young, networking can help you to find mentors who can guide you in your career choices and maybe even recommend valuable contacts for your job.

Therefore, the best way to follow up with contacts is to request some of their time (perhaps over lunch or coffee) to give you advice on career planning. Never ask whether they have a job for you – even if they do, they will probably not bring you in for an interview until they get to know you better.

Most mentors will not have a job for you, but they can recommend professional organizations, job boards and other contacts that can help you advance your career. If you find a good mentor, be sure to follow up with them from time to time. Job opportunities frequently open up unexpectedly and employers are most likely to bring in someone whom they know and trust.

Many job seekers find that one of the most important aspects of job searching is to develop an efficient strategy.

Depending on how soon you need a new job, job searching can turn into a part-time or full-time job in itself. One of the advantages of the digital age is that there are many online tools to help you keep track of new job openings and professional contacts. At the end of the blog I listed some services to help you track new job openings.

I highly recommend a system to help you keep track of your job searching activities. In many cases a simple Excel spreadsheet will be sufficient which lists the dates you applied to each job and professional contacts you have made. This will help you determine when to follow up with leads or contacts. There are professional job search management tools out there as well. One of them is Jibberjabber.com, which has the option of a free account.