

Juggling Your Job Search

How to look for a job while you're still employed

By Beth Braccio Hering



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While the common belief is that it's easier to get hired when you already have a job, don't make the mistake of thinking the process is a cakewalk. Juggling the demands of your current workplace with the time and effort needed to seek out a new position can be tricky and stressful. Before tackling the market, develop a plan of action that will maximize your chances of landing what you want without jeopardizing what you already have.

Confidentiality

Oftentimes, the first concern of a job seeker who is already employed is keeping the search hidden from others at her workplace. This worry is not unfounded. "Some managers do not take the news well and may react poorly," says **Duncan Mathison**, co-author of *Unlock the Hidden Job Market: 6 Steps to a Successful Job Search When Times Are Tough*. "Not getting a raise or promotion, being placed on a layoff list, or getting low-quality assignments are all potential risks."

While you obviously need to get your name out there to let potential employers know you're interested, watch how you go about doing so. **Caroline Ceniza-Levine**, career expert with **SixFigureStart®**, recommends avoiding job boards and focusing on networking. "Recognize that those same job boards that advertise for your prospective employers also advertise for your current employer. So if you put your résumé on a job board, your employer can see it. I would stay away from the general job boards entirely and focus on networking where you can control the message and who receives it."

Other tips Ceniza-Levine offers for maintaining privacy include:

- Do not use employer time, supplies, or equipment for your search.
- Turn off your LinkedIn status updates while you edit your information.
- Start building lunch time and break time into your work schedule so it's not a surprise when you are searching during the day. If you've never taken lunch outside, start doing that even if not for your job search, but just to build that into your schedule and manage people's expectations. If you work in an open floor plan, start budgeting time in conference rooms and quiet spaces, again to build this into your schedule and manage people's expectations.
- If job search attire differs significantly from your usual office clothing, start dressing up gradually. Don't all of a sudden come in a three-piece suit. Consider leaving a jacket in your office for a quick change rather than altering your entire outfit.

So what happens if despite your best efforts your biggest fear comes true and your boss finds out? "If you are confronted by your employer, give your reasons in a balanced and positive manner," Mathison recommends. "Tell your employer that you like them personally and appreciate the chance to work at the company (whether it is true or not). But also tell them that after much thought you feel you owe it to your family (or career) to explore alternatives. You want them to feel you are reluctantly looking. This may open a conversation for a better position with your current employer and gracefully avoids bad-mouthing the company or manager. You do not want to burn bridges."

Finding Time

For employed job seekers, time is on their side – and against them. With a regular paycheck already in hand, they may have more flexibility than their unemployed counterparts to hold out for what they really want. But in order to keep collecting that salary, they don't have as many hours to devote to sending out material, researching opportunities, and thinking about career goals.

One of the greatest time-related obstacles is trying to schedule interviews. Lisa Quast -- career coach, founder of Career Woman, Inc., and author of the recently launched **Career Savvy e-books** and *Your Career, Your Way* -- recommends scheduling telephone interviews before work, during lunch hours, or right after work. "Most hiring managers understand that if they're interviewing someone already employed, then they will need to work around the person's schedule. Further, most savvy hiring managers look for potential employees who specifically state that their telephone interview needs to be scheduled at a time that won't conflict with their existing job so as not to break any company policies. For hiring managers, a red flag should be raised about the ethics of candidates who are willing to use company time for interviews."

Quast says that in-person interviews should be scheduled for days when you can take time off of work. This may involve using flex-time, paid time off, or vacation days. She cautions about using sick days for interviewing. "Murphy's Law usually kicks in if you try using a sick day for interviews. Besides, it's better to not add any additional stress by worrying about who might see you when you're supposed to be sick."

As for the many tasks job searching requires, employed candidates need to develop excellent time-management skills. Quast recommends writing down a **list of the goals** you want to accomplish each week and then scheduling time for completion. For instance, your list might state to update your résumé on Saturday, have a friend review the changes and provide feedback on Sunday/Monday, update your LinkedIn profile Tuesday evening, brainstorm a list of references Wednesday evening, begin contacting potential references on Thursday evening, and research two interesting companies on Friday night.

Be Realistic

Holding a job, looking for work, and tending to other obligations in your life all at the same time is not going to be simple. You'll only set yourself up for stress and disappointment if you expect things to happen overnight. Also, don't become so wrapped up in your search that you fail to perform your current duties to the best of your ability. As Ceniza-Levine notes, "Remember that you need to do a great job where you are in order to get a strong enough reference and the results you need to get a better job later. Checking out is not an option."

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