

Job Seekers: How To Respond If Your Boss Finds Out You're Job Hunting

Lisa Quast, Forbes | January 26, 2015



It's 2015 and you've decided to look for a different job. While your goal is to do everything possible to [avoid giving away your job search](#), there's always the chance that your boss will find out. So what can you do? Plan your strategy as to how you'll handle the situation if your boss finds out – *before* you begin your job search.

Deciding how to answer your boss if he or she directly confronts you about your job search will depend on several factors, such as:

- The type and level of emotions your boss exhibits.
- How much you fear your job will be in jeopardy if your boss finds out the truth.
- The amount of damage to your relationship with your boss that could occur.
- Whether you believe telling your boss the truth might actually help your current situation.
- How comfortable you feel about lying versus telling the truth.

Think through all your options and consider how you could respond, should the situation occur. Here are four options to consider:

Option 1: Lie. While I don't encourage lying to others (especially your boss), one way to potentially save your job is to say, *"No, I'm not looking for a new job. Why do you ask?"* – to try and find out background information on why your boss believes you are job hunting. Once you know how your boss became suspicious, you'll be better able to determine how to keep it from happening again. Did something you do on social media arouse their suspicion, such as updating your LinkedIn profile? Did a coworker find out and say something? Did someone see you surfing job sites on your computer while at work and tell your boss?

While lying might be a short-term solution, keep in mind it can create a more difficult situation later, if you decide to quit after finding another job. You may burn a bridge with your boss because he or she will know you lied as soon as you resign.

Option 2: The Side-Step. This is similar to lying, but it can sometimes help. For example, you might say, *"No, I'm actually helping a friend with their job search."* Then you could also say, *"Why do you ask?"* to try and find out why your boss believes you are job hunting.

Option 3: The Semi-Truth. This one can be helpful if your boss confronts you with proof of your job search, such as finding a job description you printed on the department's shared printer. In this case you could choose to be semi-truthful by saying a variation of, *"Yes, I printed a few job descriptions. With performance appraisals coming up, I wanted to see what responsibilities are included in similar and slightly higher level positions to mine at other companies. I've been feeling less challenged lately and I thought looking at other job descriptions might give me some ideas to include in my self-evaluation for areas I'd like to develop, so I can move into higher level positions."*

This type of response tries to convert the "oops" into a way to improve your current job because it can open the door for communication with your boss on why you aren't feeling challenged (if that's one of your issues) so you can mutually determine solutions. Sitting down with your boss to calmly and professionally discuss the specific reasons you are unhappy in your current position can often lead to positive outcomes, such as being assigned more challenging projects, having your job changed to include other responsibilities, or even having your boss recommend you for a position in a different department.

Option 4: Honesty. There's the old saying that *"Honesty is the best policy"* – and this can also work when confronted by your boss about your job search. The key is to first try to find out where or how they found out. When your boss says, *"Are you looking for another job?"* say, *"Why do you ask?"* and see how he or she responds. Based on their answer, you may choose to tell them the truth, which could be a variation of, *"Yes. I have been looking at what's available within and outside the company. I have been feeling frustrated because I don't see many chances for growth or promotion opportunities in my current position, so I'm looking at what else is available."*

When you tell the truth, it's important to say it without being defensive or accusatory. Then use the moment as an opportunity to open a discussion with your boss: *"I'm interested in career growth and I would really appreciate it if we could schedule time to sit down and discuss my performance, responsibilities and potential career paths in the company."*

Hiding your job search can be difficult in this era of social media use, so take time to plan your strategy as to how you'll handle the situation if your boss finds out – *before* you begin your job search.

~ Lisa Quast, author of the book, [Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want, Every Time](#). Join me on Twitter @careerwomaninc

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