

Looking for a New Job - Discreetly

by Dona DeZube - September 26, 2007

Elizabeth Taylor excepted, most people change jobs more often than they do mates. But no matter how many times you do it, looking for a new position when you already have one can be tricky.

What behavior is reasonable and what crosses the line? "Keep in mind that even though you may be looking for a new job, you still must devote your full attention to your current company while in the office," says DeLynn Senna, executive director of North American permanent placement services for Robert Half International in Menlo Park, Calif. "This means you shouldn't use your work computer to search job boards, for example, or speak with potential employers from the phone at your desk."

Most companies would make an exception if you're searching internal job postings. Just be sure to let your supervisor know before you apply for another slot in your own firm.

"The competition to hire skilled professionals is intensifying, and most managers would rather keep a top performer with the organization in some capacity than lose the person to another company," Senna says. "If you're open about your intentions, your current manager likely can put in a good word and smooth the transition for you."

Look Inward

Still, you should be cautious about who you talk to. "Network for opportunities with those you trust," suggests Roberta Chinsky Matuson, president of Human Resource Solutions in Brookline, Mass. "This will help reduce the likelihood that your current employer will find out about your search before you are ready to tell them about it."

That hush-hush attitude should carry through into your dealings with recruiters, says Jim Boghos, president of Corporate Search America in Longwood, Fla. "Usually the way an employer finds out someone is looking is when a potential suitor is unable to keep confidentiality in the highest regard," he warns.

Boghos once had a candidate interview with a manager who was new to the recruiting process. The candidate had worked at the same firm as three of the manager's existing employees. The manager asked them about the candidate and requested they keep the man's job hunt to themselves. "Problem is they still had friendships at (the other firm), and unfortunately people enjoy gossip," Boghos says. "My candidate was threatened and then was never again trusted to be part of the inner circle. He became ostracized and eventually left for a fresh start elsewhere."

Your Online Self

The perils of real life aren't the only risks a job hunter faces. What you do online can also reveal your intentions. For example, when you post your resume on eFinancialCareers, should you make your contact information visible or keep your profile confidential?

The real issue isn't whether you post your name, it's whether the recruiter can quickly locate you via e-mail or cell phone, says Gregory Reymann, a recruiter for the Judge Group in West Conshohocken, Pa. If you have queries forwarded to an e-mail address, check that address daily. Returning calls at lunch or in the early evening is fine, since many recruiters do work late in order to speak with candidates outside of work hours. However, he warns, don't expect a recruiter to hang around the office waiting for your call until you get home from work and have dinner.

If you want to remain anonymous, be careful about what you put in your resume. "Don't do anything that's a dead giveaway to where you work, like mentioning your experience with proprietary software or unique delivery system," says Matt Johnston, chief executive officer of Workway, a Burbank, Calif., staffing firm. Moves like that make it too easy for human resources personnel to snag you.

Also, be careful that your online self doesn't trip up your real world self. "Don't make the mistake of posting something on [your blog](#) about your current job search," says Matuson. "More and more employers are doing Google searches on their employees."

How to Sneak Around

If you're at all good at job hunting, you're eventually going to have to sneak out to do interviews. When Mark Hammond, now a national sales manager for Taylor, Bean & Whitaker Mortgage Corp., was finishing his MBA at night, he worked for a boss who watched his every move, making it difficult to do interviews.

"I was expected to be in the office at 7 a.m., which was an hour and a half before the bond market opened," he recalls. "If I

left the office for lunch, I would come back to a computer screen full of sticky notes with things like 'Where are you?' or 'Come see me.' As I got closer to finishing my MBA, I advised headhunters that I could only interview on Saturdays in fear of alerting my boss to my ambitions."

If you can't schedule interviews on the weekends or before or after work, be careful how you dress, warns Johnston. "If the office is casual, a suit is going to be noticed," he says. Keep your interview clothes in the car or in your off-site gym locker, and change on the way to the interview. Another alternative is to schedule all your interviews for a single day, then use a personal vacation day to take that time off.

You May Not Go

Finally, Johnson observes, remember as you tip-toe around that you may end up keeping the job you have. "We always caution people not to damage the bond of trust they have with their current manager," he says. "At your next job, you may be learning new skills that will enable you to manage the company you just left."

Besides, showing respect is the right thing to do. "If you are disrespectful toward your firm during your job search, you are unlikely to receive a strong recommendation from your manager," Senna concludes. "On the other hand, practicing proper etiquette can help you avoid burning bridges."