



How do I best use LinkedIn if I'm changing careers?¹

As the global economy seems to be improving a bit and we're reaching the midpoint of the year, it appears that people who've been contemplating a move for a while are now ready to take action. While everyone in transition has a unique situation, here are some suggestions for how to use LinkedIn to help make a successful career change:

1. Become an expert on the career you want to pursue

From the moment you begin considering a change, start to read as much as you can about the industry or function you want to join. Know which companies are in the news, what the hot products or services are and when key conferences are taking place. Being in the know will help you discover organizations that might be hiring and will help you make a good impression as you begin networking and eventually interviewing for positions in your new industry.

A great way to do this research is through [LinkedIn Today](#), a new, free tool that customizes your news experience by sourcing content from your network and lets you follow industries you might be interested in. You can set up LinkedIn Today's personalized news dashboard to keep you informed on all the news in the industry you want to pursue. You can even have the top daily industry headlines sent right to your email inbox. Another great way to research new industries or companies is with [LinkedIn Signal](#). It's easy to get started: just search for specific keyword, topics or products you'd like to track and find the hottest trending topics in your desired industry.

2. Optimize your LinkedIn profile for your new career

Your next crucial task is to revise your LinkedIn profile so it supports your career change goals. Start with your headline — the most important piece of real estate on your profile — and use it to promote the transition you want to make. For instance, “Experienced corporate executive seeking position in nonprofit management.” If your job hunt is not public, try a general headline such as “Experienced product and marketing executive.”

Next, write a very strong Summary statement that briefly explains what you're doing now and the fact that you're changing careers — don't leave it up to the reader to guess that you want to make a change. Be sure to keep your explanation concise and positive (i.e., never lament the fact that your current industry is in decline or that you got laid off and are being forced into a switch).

Then focus on explaining your “*transferable skills*” — those skills you have that can apply to multiple industries or roles. Examples of transferable skills include: people

¹ Pollak, L. (2011) <http://blog.linkedin.com/2011/06/07/7-linkedin-tips-for-career-changers/>

management, technical training, sales, communication, negotiation, leadership, creativity, organization and general administrative skills. As much as possible, you'll want to mention skills that you know are important in the industry or function you aspire to. Not sure what those are? Look at LinkedIn job postings and the profiles of people in your desired career for ideas.

Once you've revised your profile, ask a few people who have a background in this field to check it out and provide any additional "insider" tips.

3. Join LinkedIn groups related to your desired career

Joining LinkedIn groups in your desired industry or function is a great way to build your knowledge, image and network in your new field. Remember that your group memberships appear on your LinkedIn profile, so they indicate to people that you are serious about your new career (if you are job hunting secretly, you can adjust your profile settings so these group memberships do not appear). You can remain in one or two groups related to your former industry, but you need to give the impression that the majority of your networking is now taking place in the field you want to enter.

Find which groups to join by using the Groups Directory feature and by looking up the profiles of people you admire in your desired career and seeing what groups they belong to. Try observing group discussions for a while to see what people are talking about, and then join in the conversation. Once you feel comfortable and confident, start to interact in discussions, post and answer questions and respond to polls. Groups are a great way to get noticed and start to build industry relationships.

4. Alert your network to your career change plans

Networking is crucial to a career change, particularly if you are currently employed and not able to publicly announce your career change plans. Start by reaching out individually to everyone you already know — friends, family, neighbors, former colleagues, former classmates — to explain your desired transition and ask directly for their support.

When you do this, don't make the common mistake of sending out generic, blast messages about your job search. No one likes these and they generate little response. I know it's time consuming, but the very best way to enlist your existing contacts in your career change efforts is to reach out to each person individually.

In each note, be very specific about what you're looking for as people probably still identify you with your previous career. Ask to set up a phone call or coffee to meet and talk further, and be sure to offer to help each person with anything he or she might need. If you make the extra effort to connect one-on-one, most people will make the extra effort to help you.

5. Talk to anyone who works or has worked in the field you want to join

In addition to networking with your existing contacts in any industry, nothing beats talking to a real person who has firsthand experience in the profession that interests you. Ask your existing contacts if they know anyone in your desired field they would be willing introduce you to.

Additionally, use [LinkedIn's Advanced Search](#) to research people in your desired industry with whom you have something in common (e.g. you attended the same university, worked at the same employer in the past or belong to a shared LinkedIn group). You can reach out through LinkedIn connection requests or InMail (if you have a premium account) to request a brief, informal discussion.

During all of these conversations with industry members, ask people to recommend insider tips, must-read publications and advice on what jobs in their field are most realistic for people to transition into. Keep in mind that it's not appropriate to ask any of these contacts for a job, just for advice and guidance. And don't forget to send a gracious thank you email to thank people for their time.

6. Sign up for LinkedIn job alerts

Sign up for email alerts of LinkedIn job listings in your desired career field. You can customize these alerts by job function, location, keyword and other factors to make sure you're receiving exactly the opportunities you want. It's never too soon to start reviewing available positions and applying for roles that look like a good fit for your transferable skills. When applying for a job in a new profession, provide a detailed cover letter that maps your experience to the job requirements. If you can connect the dots for the employer, and showcase why you are a good fit for the job, you will be more successful in the application process.

7. Make real world changes

Finally, remember that LinkedIn and other people's help can only do so much. You may find through your rebranding, research and networking efforts that you need to build additional skills and experience to successfully transition to the new position you are seeking. If this is the case, start to build new experiences any way you can — volunteer work, internships, blog posts, additional education, etc. — to show that you're really serious about breaking into a new profession.

Good luck!

Have any other LinkedIn tips for career changers? Please share in the Comments! Or, share with us on [@linkedin](#).