

LinkedIn: Career-minded gold mine? Or job search junk yard?

Written by Julie Desmond

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When I first discovered LinkedIn, I was linking in a rural network landscape - a few people out there, but not many. A person could check their LI messages once a week or so and keep up with expectations. Kind of like looking out the window over your farm fields and feeling thrilled when a car turns up your dusty road. Well, times have changed, and small-town LI is now a sprawling suburban network, verging on a becoming a city in itself.

LinkedIn is getting crowded, and the newest users have suspicious motives. "If someone connects with me on LinkedIn," says one manager, "then I know they are looking for a job." How can an honest networker escape the assumption that all newcomers to the countryside are evil? Your best bet is to take a two-tiered approach: use it, and personalize it.

Use LinkedIn daily. I don't work for or represent the folks at that network, but the same applies to whatever network you want working for you. Update your status every evening, participate in one discussion per week, and invite a set number of connections weekly, as well. Respond to invitations and inquiries promptly. Being active means you are staying involved and actively pursuing opportunities to help others connect.

Personalize it. When you invite others to join your network, skip the standard invite and invest sixty seconds composing a brief note describing why you hope to connect with this person. Don't lose sight of that what-I-can-do-for-you concept. And make a real effort to reconnect. By reviewing other people's updates, you will know what they are involved in and how you can help them move forward.

Joining groups on LinkedIn is a complete waste of keystrokes unless you participate in your groups. Choose a few that pertain to your true interests and talents, (not necessarily job seeking) and keep an eye on those. People who change up their groups occasionally are able to keep conversations fresh and stay current within an industry or interest.

Networking doesn't have to be annoying; having a few good neighbors can improve your life and your life's work. LinkedIn and other similar boards are whatever you make of them, so open your front door and invite a few people to the party.

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