

Job Search on Company Time?

It has been suggested in various articles that you treat your job search like a full-time job. But when do you have the time to look with a schedule that includes working 50 plus hours a week, going to school, caring for a family, running errands and trying to squeeze in some sleep? Simple. You do it at work.

Whether scouring job boards or searching company web sites 11 million people on average look for jobs online every week. One quarter of employees who use a computer at work admit to searching on company time, according to a recent survey. And, job site traffic spikes on weekdays during lunchtime hours. But proceed with caution when searching for a job on company time; the key is to keep your current job, and income, until you find a new one. Follow these tips:

Know the rules

A growing number of employers have established policies on employer Internet use including monitoring employee personal email abuse, personal instant messenger use, and operation of personal Web sites on company time. Those companies are putting their policies into action: 26 percent of employers have fired workers for misusing the Internet and another 25 percent have terminated employees for email misuse, according to a 2005 survey.

Play it safe

The survey mentioned above states that 76 percent of businesses monitor employee Web use and 55 percent keep and review email messages. Use a personal email account when discussing job search related items and applications. Plus, employers would rather receive correspondence from personal accounts than from competitor addresses. And most importantly, you don't want to send a message to a potential new employer that you conduct job searches on company time.

Don't advertise your search

Don't wear your interview suit to your semi-casual office. Nothing sets off a red flag like wearing your best suit on a normal working day.. So how should you handle the wardrobe dilemma? For both men and women, suit bottoms (i.e. trousers, skirts) are always passable for business casual. Bring a shoulder bag/duffle with a jacket in it, and change en route to/from the interview. For women, it is especially easy to wear a casual

blouse under a suit – once a jacket and stockings are removed, no one will detect an afternoon interviewee. For men, make sure your shirt stands on its own without a tie and you can easily make the switch.

Choose references wisely

Former co-workers who have left to go elsewhere are usually the first ones to turn to if you want to keep your search confidential. But current co-workers are really the ideal names to pass along to your potential employer. Put a significant amount of thought into who will keep your confidence at your current job. Often people find peers rather than managers to be safer bets. As long as your reference can speak to your work ethic, enthusiasm, drive and accomplishments, you don't need to search high and low for a senior executive to speak on your behalf – go with who knows you best.

Timing is everything

The breakfast interview is an ideal forum. Meetings scheduled at 8.00 a.m. are often finished in time to arrive at work by 9.00 a.m. If they run over, any number of reasons can be offered for a delayed arrival, but don't go over the top. "Personal time" is still an acceptable reason for taking vacation time. Claiming sick runs you the risk of being asked to log on and work from home, or at least making yourself available. The best maneuvers are those when an interview can be tacked onto other pre-planned time off (long weekends, etc.) or non-work hours.

Never stop giving your all at work

Job seekers can experience intense paranoia at work. If you devote yourself fully to what you're doing in the hours you're there (and job search with a vengeance in the hours when you're not), you'll continue to get the praise and recognition to keep you on track at your current job. In the end, the possibility always exists that you'll stay. Don't shoot yourself in the foot by making co-workers suspicious and then maybe not landing a new job.