

10 Ways to Help LinkedIn Help Your Career

If you're on LinkedIn, you should be on it for the right reasons: to nurture and develop your professional network, i.e., develop your career. Even if you're not currently looking for a job, it's always easier to network from a position of strength. Not to mention, the best networking happens when you're not terrified, or broke, and instead can allow yourself to relax and really *listen* to other people. You're never going to regret attending a networking event and having an interesting conversation. It's up to you to determine how far those conversations go. If you have a job, the connection can simply lead to you broadening your horizons, or even just helping someone else.

Conversely, if you're on LinkedIn, with a bad profile, you're not just hurting yourself, you're hurting any and all of your future possibilities. I'm not okay with that. Therefore, with spring (theoretically) only days away, and the warmer weather bringing the promise of numerous open-bar networking events on the horizon, here's 10 ways to fix up your LinkedIn profile and start being all you should be!

1. **Smile for the camera:** A profile without a photo is an advertisement for how uncomfortable you are with yourself...and who wants to hire that? You don't have to pay a fancy photographer, just dress professionally—wear your favorite outfit, the outfit that makes you feel your best--and have someone who likes you take some photos on their phone. Take enough photos till you are able to relax, and let your confidence shine through. Hiring managers, and people who can potentially help you, are going to be (emotionally) sensitive to your photo. No photo, and the viewer will wonder what's wrong with you. (Come on. This is America. We're obsessed with being attractive.) A grumpy or inappropriate photo? Why don't you just change your headline to "I don't want to be hired?" People have enough stress at home, no one will knowingly bring more angst into the workplace. A photo of your baby? Don't tell Lindsay Lohan's mother, but there are child labor laws in this country. Let your baby worry, eventually, about his own LinkedIn profile: you need to present, today, as you wish to be perceived.
2. **An intelligible headline with relevance to your industry:** Your headline is one of the few things that everyone will read. You want to give people a headline that is reason enough to *keep* reading. You want to make people care. For people to care, you have to answer their needs. A headline that articulates what you do in a manner appropriate and relevant to your industry, is an excellent place to start the emotional attraction that is networking. On the other hand, a headline like "Searching for Opportunities," is a great way to broadcast to the world that you don't know what you want. If you don't know what you want, how is anyone else supposed to know, and, more importantly, how is anyone else supposed to help you? Get out of your own way and allow people to help you.
3. **Show me, don't tell me:** I'm not from Missouri, but if you want to impress me, you better show me what you've done, since talk is cheap. You can write a Summary section filled with breathless hyperbole about what a dynamic leader you are...or you can demonstrate your leadership abilities with a Summary based on factual experiences that allow me to infer, "Wow, this person must be a very inspiring leader." When you've planted that idea in the reader's brain, the reader is hooked. Instead of telling me that you're a team-builder, write a concise, well-written summary that articulates, in black and white, examples of your leadership in your industry.

4. **Claim your narrative:** As I always tell clients, it's *crucial* that you construct the story of your life, from all the "chaos" (i.e. daily life), otherwise the reader is going to put his or her spin on things, and their version probably won't be flattering to you. For me, creating this very business was a way to reconcile many seemingly incongruous experiences—theater, TV news, living and working abroad, law school—into one linear narrative. I had to organize and understand my own narrative, to see how valuable it was. And so do you! It's up to you to tell the story of your (professional) life in a way that compels the reader to keep reading. This is not the time for false modesty; if you don't mention it, people will assume it didn't happen. (This is, unfortunately, especially true for women and minorities. NPR blathers on about our post-racial society, and that's a pretty thought, but no. YOU. NEED. TO. SELL!) Some people don't mention anything in their Summary thinking, incorrectly, that it's enough to mention it in the Experience and/or Education sections. However, if you don't give the reader a reason to keep reading, he or she probably won't make it to your Experience, and won't see that you speak fluent Chinese; or spear-headed an idea at work that saved your company millions; or that you've been self-employed since you were a teenager. Your Summary is the perfect place to detail awards you've won, both in school and on the job; foreign languages you may speak—and please don't decide that no one cares if you're fluent in Italian because shut up, you're wrong--if you were in sororities, wrote huge grants, did volunteer work, lived overseas, were on Dean's List, created software, won work awards, spoke on panels: yes, yes oh my god yes to all of that! Claim. Your. Narrative! Your (unique) life and your (unique, messy, weird, WONDERFUL) life has value.
5. **Less buzzwords, more good writing:** The CIA may be (in)famous for saying, "Never apologize, never explain," but you still need to explain what you did/do at your jobs in a way that even your memaw can understand. If you can't explain, in simple English, the range of your contributions and responsibilities...I'm going to assume that you yourself aren't 100% sure. Ideally, you want to aim for 2-3 sentences, per job, explaining the impact of your work. Don't tell me, for example, that you answered the phones at your internship—unless you want to make me reach for a dirty vodka martini at 9am—tell me that you were the point of contact for people using your organization's services, and that you were in charge of a certain amount of cases and what each case entailed. Tell me about your initiative, your hustle, your passion, the money raised, the people reached: tell me about the impact you had!
6. **Awkward.com:** This is LinkedIn, not Facebook. LinkedIn is not the place for inappropriate email addresses (bikerchickflix@gmail.com), or fun facts, or being endorsed for (I'm not even making this up) "eating pizza" or "your mom." All that tells me is that you and your friends are not ready for prime time. Remove all irrelevant certifications, such as small business stuff, if you're looking for a full-time job, since companies want to know that you're going to drink their Kool-Aid, not just use them to pay the bills. Your entire profile should be written from the POV of your (desired) industry. Ideally, your profile is a testament to your relevant experience, not another hurdle for your ambitions to get caught on.
7. **Join the conversation:** You may loathe the sight of your alma mater, but you're going to have to work out that anger in yoga or/or dating, as you join the LinkedIn groups of your college, grad school, industry, work, and the like. Even better, joining these groups may allow you to see that people have indeed matured since law school and while they may never become your BFF, at least you can help each other out. Join alumni groups and when people post good news or celebrate a work anniversary, take 45 vital seconds out of your day to hit the like button. If you

see someone you know is looking for work, and you know someone who could help him...would it kill you to introduce them? Oh, don't give me that look. Have some empathy for other people, and treat them as you wish to be treated. You should also follow the companies you're interested in, since that's a great way to see what issues these companies are discussing, and allow you to consider how you can present yourself as a vital participant in that conversation.

8. **Use your status updates:** LinkedIn isn't Facebook, that's true, but that doesn't mean you can't use your status updates to keep you and your career in people's minds. Obviously, these status updates must be relevant to your industry's culture, and it never hurts to err on the side of caution before mentioning specific details. If, for example, your team achieved some important goals, you should mention that. If you went to a great conference, or spoke on a smart panel, or read an interesting economics book, or re-connected with a mentor who inspired you again...why not mention all of that? Use the "@" when mentioning your company, or the book, or the conference, so that other people in your field become aware of you (as a person to watch). That way, whenever people search for the thing mentioned, your status/profile will pop up in their search! The more people aware of you, the more opportunities you reap.
#yourewelcome
9. **Recommendations:** I'm chary of who I accept recommendations from, and you should be too. I'm not interested in trading recommendations, or getting recommendations from people who write for everyone, or people whose recommendations make me wince for the past glories of the English language. Remember that you have to approve a recommendation on LinkedIn for it to post, so if you get one that make you cringe, just be gracious and DON'T POST IT! You want recommendations from people you respect, and you want to make it easy for those people to write great recommendations by giving them talking points, and explaining how specifically you plan to use the recommendations, as in a job search, or re-branding yourself, or moving up the corporate ladder.
10. **Finally:** The best LinkedIn profiles make it clear who the individual is, and what they've done. The best profiles demonstrate that the individual is passionately engaged in his or her career. Those ideas are substantiated through what people are reading, thinking, their photos, links to articles, and the like. The best LinkedIn profiles make it clear that the individual knows his or her own goals. So if you're at a transitory stage in your career, be honest with yourself: is your LinkedIn profile helping or hurting you? Are you on LinkedIn because you know what you want, or because everyone else is? If the thought of your LinkedIn profile makes you want to barf, stop tormenting yourself and take it down! Shame is never helpful. Take your profile down, and focus on getting your mind right. LinkedIn isn't going anywhere. When you're ready to come back and be a beast, and network from a position of power, LinkedIn will be here.

I hope you found these points helpful. Want more personalized information and help for your own career? Of course you do! Email me at carlotazee@gmail.com, and become a fan of my business Facebook page, "Carlotaworldwide Creativity Yenta," for a free consultation!