

Applying to Employers and Keeping up Appearances

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As president of IT Catalysts, Bob Lewis runs a consultancy specializing in IT organizational effectiveness and strategic business integration. He is an award-winning author who has produced seven books and more than 650 columns discussing techniques for effectively running organizations focusing on information technology. Currently he keeps a blog on [InfoWorld](#) entitled "Advice Line."

If you are still working, it may prove difficult to keep the news about your active job hunt quiet. Whether you love or hate your present job, you have to find a way to remain professional as you seek employment elsewhere. For jobseekers who are trying to stay under the radar at their current employers, there are three key goals to focus on:

- Keep up appearances
- Avoid scheduling problems
- Negotiate job offers

Keep up Appearances

Unless you want your last weeks or months at your job to be spent with hostile coworkers and supervisors, you must keep up appearances. If you are going to be leaving anyway, it is easy to get into the mindset of not caring. You may want to ditch out on meetings or training sessions.

Is it important for you to go to training seminars if you are changing careers anyway?

The answer is, **YES**, it is important, and for two reasons:

1. The worst that can happen is that you learn nothing useful. Every other outcome is better than that.
2. Failing to attend these meetings can tip-off your manager that you have lost interest in your current position.

No matter what it takes, you must establish a way to keep interested and busy at work, even while actively job hunting. Remember that you need your current job to maintain your livelihood. In addition, it may take months to get a new job offer. If your work suffers because of your disinterest, you may be fired before you find new employment.

Avoid Scheduling Problems

Job interviews will most likely occur during normal business hours, which is when you are supposed to be at work. You can't be at both places at the same time, so you have to find the most professional way to attend job interviews without raising suspicions.

Sometimes you can schedule phone interviews during your lunch hour. Your manager may also let you come in to work a few hours early so that you can leave early as well. Of course, your manager may want to know why you need to leave work early, to which you could always state that you have a private appointment you can't miss.

Using paid time off (PTO) to attend interviews is better than requesting that your interviewer meet you during off-hours. By using your PTO and meeting the hiring manager during his/her regular work hours, you will show that you are considerate to that individual's schedule. Furthermore, you will prove that you are a problem-solver who is capable of handling his or her own scheduling issues.

If you do not have PTO, a good amount of hiring managers will make accommodations for interviews during off-hours. Many hiring managers understand that jobseekers are often currently employed.

Negotiate Job Offers

Completely changing careers may not result in working for one of your current organization's competitors. If you are making a lateral move, on the other hand, a rival company may make an offer you would be foolish to refuse.

No matter how good the job offer, there are many problems to consider when negotiating a lateral move to a competitor.

If you signed an employment agreement that includes a non-competing clause, you may be contractually obligated to refuse the offer. Even if job responsibilities are entirely different, there are employers out there who feel that enforcing these contracts to their limits and beyond is a wise course of action to protect company secrets.

If you have signed such an agreement, it is probably a good idea to provide a copy to the new employer's HR department **after** receiving and accepting a written offer of employment. Provide HR with an acceptance letter to the offer with these words:

"I am providing this as an ounce of prevention. Just in case my old employer contacts you with a complaint, I wanted to make sure you had this to document that your hiring me does not constitute a violation."

Being a model employee with all current and potential employers secures your professional appearance. Managing your schedule and negotiating job offers with decorum further establishes your image as the perfect candidate.

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