14 Tips for Keeping Your Job Search a Secret

If you’re employed but dedicating part of your time to seeking a new position, maybe your motto should be: “Loose lips sink ships.”

That’s because it’s perfectly legal for your employer to fire you on the grounds that you’re looking for a new job—whether or not your search is conducted during working hours. Such dismissals are more likely if your job involves proprietary company information, but in general you should avoid telling co-workers or superiors about your job search because it can poison work relationships and raise questions about your commitment to your current position.

“You will tell your favorite co-workers ‘Guess what—I accepted a new job!’ at the appropriate time,” advises Liz Ryan, author of “Reinvention Roadmap,” in Forbes. “Until then, you won’t breathe a word about your job search, even to your workplace besties.”

Some other advice for keeping your job search clandestine:

1. Continually remind others you’re keeping your hunt under wraps; otherwise they may assume it’s OK to broadcast your news anywhere.
2. It’s unethical to use company time or resources, including printers or company-issued phones, to aid in your search. Further, such equipment can retain electronic records.
3. Use your personal email for all search-related correspondence, and avoid checking it on your work computer.
4. Consider optimizing recruiters who can work quietly to find opportunities on your behalf.
5. Don’t tout your job search on social media or via a blanket email to your contact list. You may think you’re limiting your messages to friends, but you can’t control the info they pass on to others—a range that could include your co-workers.
6. Don’t wear tell-tale interview suits to work if your normal garb is casual. You can always change clothes in a public restroom before and after your interview.
7. Never list your current boss as a reference on job applications unless he or she has given his or her approval.
8. Keep your resume off job boards or recruiting sites, especially those regularly accessed by your HR department.
9. Significant updates to your LinkedIn profile can tip off LinkedIn contacts (and even casual observers) to your search, especially if you don’t adjust the function that automatically offers contacts such updates.
10. Be aware that others may track your movements to interview sites if you’re using the search-and-discovery app Foursquare.
11. Avoid applying to blind help wanted ads that don’t list the employer; it could be your own.
12. Step outside the office or into your vehicle when making or accepting search-related phone calls.
13. Networking is highly advisable during your search, but remain very cautious about whom you approach and what you say. Instead of immediately asking others if their employer has job openings, start with a question about their company’s growth.
14. It’s not unreasonable to ask potential employers to schedule interviews after hours so you’re not frequently leaving work at odd times. After all, the hiring company would most likely appreciate the same courtesy from its current employees.