

Why LinkedIn is important to you

By Paperitalo Staff

Disclaimer—my company and I are not affiliated with LinkedIn in any way other than we use their services.

Let's look at it this way—you buy insurance for you and your family's health, your car, your home, your life. You don't have any insurance for your career—and no one will sell you any. If you are like most people, you have deluded yourself into thinking you are indispensable, your company will never close your facility, and your company is done with downsizing exercises and so forth. It is called denial. If you want to know how that is working out for your fellow toilers in this industry, call any of the 1,000 employees at the Courtland, Alabama mill of International Paper (and I am not picking on IP, they made the correct business decision).

There is one action in particular that can help you prepare and mitigate such actions when (not if) they happen to you. Don't get me wrong, the correct word is "when," not "if," for it is when you turn about 55 years old you are most vulnerable. This action is to become fluent in LinkedIn.

It amazes me how clueless people are about LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). LinkedIn is a permanent repository of résumés and information. You should have your profile there now. Headhunters are trolling LinkedIn 24 hours a day looking for candidates. The beauty of LinkedIn is that it started early and has millions of members, so it has become the de facto depository of human resources and other information in many industries, not just our own.

You need to be there before you need to be there and you need to understand how it works. I am convinced such fluency could shorten a job search ("when" you have one, not "if") by weeks if not months. I'll give you an example of how illiterate people are about LinkedIn. Paperitalo Publications runs nearly 50 groups on LinkedIn. Occasionally, I invite specific people to join specific groups. On many more than one occasion, they will write back on LinkedIn's internal messaging system, "Thanks, Jim." What they needed to do was check the box on the invite to automatically join. They are not fluent enough to do this, so nothing happens.

At the time you have lost your job, you are way late in getting known on LinkedIn. You are playing catch-up and your time is short. Spend a few minutes with LinkedIn every week and you will be in good shape when the time comes.

Another issue—understand your social networking sites. LinkedIn is nothing like Facebook. LinkedIn is for working adults, largely white collar (although I have seen many blue collar folks there, too). And I mentioned there are groups besides just your profile. You might want to check out some of ours. The Cellulose Community, which we started in 2008, has more than 3,100 members from around the world. Our cluster of specific groups, the Talotech groups, are growing nicely. We even have one for advertisers, called Advertising Arguments.

There are two kinds of groups—open groups and private groups. All of ours are private, in other words, we have to approve your participation. Open groups attract folks not necessarily interested in your issues. For example, our Cellulose Community at one time was attracting folks interested in blowing cellulose insulation into your attic. That is not quite what we had in mind and we turned down their membership requests.

The groups are important. I don't understand why anyone would belong to an organization with annual dues when through LinkedIn groups they can receive quality information on a daily basis on subjects particularly interesting to them. It is a matter of tradition, I suppose. For a long time, Wikipedia was considered inferior to printed encyclopedias until a number of studies proved otherwise.

So, add a little insurance to your family's livelihood. Invest some time in becoming fluent in LinkedIn.

For safety this week, there are many LinkedIn groups devoted to safety issues. Find some today.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##