

“Just Browsing”: Looking for Positions While Employed*By Melanie G. Lammers*

It's Saturday afternoon, and on your way home from the dry cleaners, you spot an amazing three-tiered red velvet cake with buttercream frosting in the window of a bakery. Perhaps you even dare to step inside for a few minutes and look around. The moment someone says, "Can I help you," however, your response is the same as always: "No, I'm just browsing."

Retailers would like to make you think that "just browsing" is undesirable, and most won't give you a second look unless you suddenly appear extremely interested in a product. Unlike when someone is enticed into a bakery by a red velvet cake, though, when an employee is "just browsing" for a new position, it is a surefire sign that at the end of the day, he or she is actually interested in finding other work.

Employers know and understand this, and it scares them slightly. In the long run, losing a current employee and hiring a replacement, even if the new hire gets a lower pay rate due to a lack of experience, initially costs an organization money. Even without formal training sessions, productivity slows down during the transitional time in which the new employee is assimilating. Unless a company is in the process of layoffs, any

loss is just that: a loss for the organization.

For this reason, employers are not only keeping closer eyes than you might think on their employees for signs of unexpected resignation, but they are also on the lookout for employees who have senses of loyalty and dedication to their work and their employers.

Out of respect for the feelings of potential employers and current employers, a certain level of discretion is required on your behalf. Your general motivation for this is two-fold.

If your current employer sees your resignation coming before you do, it may just let you go to save money or look for a replacement when you aren't even sure you want to leave. If your potential employer sees that you are blatantly seeking new employment without respect for the requirements and needs of your current employer, you may come across as fickle or disrespectful, and the position you're seeking may go to someone else.

Here are three small things you can do to avoid becoming the browser who became a poser:

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1. Clearly label all employment documents as confidential. You can also add a sentence to the cover letter explaining that your position inquiry should be kept private. For example, you might write, "As my current employer is unaware I am seeking a more challenging opportunity, please respect the confidentiality of this inquiry. Thank you for your time and consideration." This dodges the bullet of a call for references that comes when your boss isn't expecting it.
2. If possible, list a private email address as your primary contact address. Free accounts are available from a variety of sources if you do not have a private account with your Internet provider. Be sure that your account name is professional; john.doe@gmail.com will come across as much more professional than heresyourjohnny@yahoo.com. Your domain name should also be that of a well-known website, such as Gmail, Yahoo, or MSN. Domain names of your school alumni organization or clubs that you belong to appear unprofessional, as well.
3. When references are requested, once again, remind employers of the confidentiality of your current job search, but be sure to provide them as soon as possible. Employers will treat the matter with discretion if you are cooperative. If you avoid providing a list of references or past employers, you will appear to be hiding something much bigger.