

## The Tale of Three Job Seekers: A Social Media Story

Written by Nick Sanders

Friday, 03 February 2017 00:00

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This is a weird environment, isn't it? The way things used to work don't seem to work that way anymore.

Back in the day, if you wanted a job you read the help wanted ads in the paper. (In fact, if you were a smart high-schooler or college student, you looked at the help wanted ads and measured which jobs had more openings than others, so as to help you figure out what jobs were in demand.) You found a couple of jobs you thought you might be suited for, and you submitted a resume along with a cover letter. Typed on an electric typewriter and signed by hand using a pen. The recruiter sorted through the resumes and cover letters, weeding out unqualified candidates and those who had too many typos. A short list of interviewees was compiled, and the subsequent interviews (plus perhaps a background check) determined who got the job. If you were lucky, you knew somebody already at the company and that person could put in a good word for you. (In fact, at Hughes Aircraft Company that was about the *only* way to get hired: You had to know somebody or be related to somebody. But we digress.)

It doesn't work like that anymore, does it?

Now we have job sites and LinkedIn and social media. Everything seems to be electronic. You submit your background info electronically. You upload your resume electronically. At many companies, it doesn't really matter who you know, because all resumes have to follow the same electronic path. If you know somebody, it's likely to be via social media rather than from a personal relationship. (Some people have thousands of "networking connections" on their accounts, filled with people they've never met in person, and perhaps never even interacted with at all.) Interviews still work in the same basic way, but background checks are handled by specialists—and they may include a review of your social media accounts.

Some folks seem to have adapted well to the changing job-seeking environment. Others? *Not so much.*

Today's story is about three job seekers who approached social media and networking in different ways. It's being presented to you as a developmental opportunity, so that you may learn from the mistakes of others. This story is absolutely true.

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Candidate A is somebody I've known for a while. We've met in real life. Candidate A was a consultant for a bit, until he found a permanent job as a senior Finance lead at a smallish government contractor. Those of us who knew him were concerned that he was a bit out of his depth, but we wished him well. Unfortunately, after a couple of years the company let him go with very little warning. What did he do? First, he sent an email to many of his LinkedIn contacts, asking if anybody knew of any job openings. Then he followed that with a second email, resume attached. He asked his social network to review his resume and to provide comments and constructive feedback. He reiterated his request to let him know of any job openings. In addition, he updated his LinkedIn profile to show he was looking for a new position, and added his resume as an attachment.

Candidate B is somebody I've never met. He sent me a LinkedIn connection invite and, as I do, I looked carefully to see why we would have a connection. Candidate B has some complementary skills and is a member of some of the same groups, so I accepted the invitation. Within 24 hours of acceptance, the first email arrived, with a resume as an attachment. I didn't respond. A week later, another email arrived, this time with a PowerPoint presentation attached. The presentation had something to do with Earned Value. I didn't respond. A week after that came two more emails, each one talking about how Candidate B could show my company the benefits of an Earned Value Management approach to project management. I deleted those emails, attachments unopened. At that point, Candidate B seems to have deleted his connection to me. At least, I haven't heard from him in a while and his name no longer comes up on my LinkedIn connection list.

Candidate C was a senior Finance leader who was recently laid-off from his company. He did some research and found that he was two or three degrees away from me on LinkedIn, so he asked a mutual connection to "introduce" him. I looked at his profile and saw some complementary skills and membership in the same groups, so I accepted the invitation. Within 48 hours I received a LinkedIn message thanking me and letting me know he was looking for a new position. He asked specifically about the company I work for (when I'm not a consultant). I told him there were no current openings at his level, which he accepted gracefully. A couple of weeks later I received another message letting me know he would be in the area soon and asking if we could meet for lunch. Why not? So we met for lunch and had a nice conversation. He asked me about certain local companies and he took notes when I replied. We shook hands and I wished him well in his job search.

Let's discuss the Candidates and the perception(s) they created by their use of social media.

Candidate A panicked. He was laid-off unexpectedly and flailed about, letting everybody know

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he was panicking. Asking relative strangers—even real life acquaintances—to review one's resume and provide feedback is an amateur move. Professionals have a polished, up-to-date resume ready to go at all times. They may not need it, but by God it is ready. More importantly, Candidate A didn't use LinkedIn in a targeted fashion. He (apparently) didn't use the Jobs Tab to do any searches. Had he done a good job searching, he wouldn't have had to ask us if we knew of any job openings. Had he done a good job searching, he would have compiled a list of companies with suitable openings, and he could have then searched those companies to see those employees on LinkedIn with whom he had a connection. Then he could have approached those individuals to see what they might know. As far as I can tell, he did none of those things. To my knowledge, Candidate A is still looking for a new position. (I'm not 100% sure, as he's not contacted me since I declined to review his resume.)

Candidate B acted like a jerk. You don't connect with people on LinkedIn in order to spam them with your resume and multiple requests to let you tell them about your self-proclaimed expertise. Had Candidate B done any homework, he would have learned that my company already had a government-approved Earned Value Management system. At a minimum, he could have introduced himself via LinkedIn messaging and then inquired about my company's experience and/or need in the Earned Value space. Instead, he just sent email after email, creating a—shall we say?—negative impression. Don't be a Candidate B.

Both Candidate A and Candidate B violated what I believe to be the cardinal rule of social networking. They both sought to take without giving anything in return. They wanted something and they wanted me (and others) to give it to them. Where was the mutual value creation in that approach? It didn't exist. Neither Candidate was likely to get what they wanted, because both were more focused on their needs than they were on creating mutual value. The focus on creating mutual value is what makes social networking work, to my way of thinking. Better yet: try giving advice and assistance without expecting anything in return. Try doing favors. Try connecting people with job openings (as I have done many times). That creates a positive force; it creates synergy. And should you need assistance in the future, I believe you'll find many people eager to help you, to repay the favor.

"Be a giver, not a taker" sounds so trite, but it works on social networks.

Now let's talk about Candidate C. Candidate C used LinkedIn to his advantage. He identified companies that might need his expertise. He identified individuals in his network (and outside of it) who might be able to provide insight into those companies. He was measured in his actions, and he came across as a seasoned professional. Inviting me to lunch was a class move. We could have had the same conversation over the phone but lunch was better. Now we

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have a personal relationship to go with the LinkedIn connection. He can be assured that, if any suitable openings come to my attention, I'm going to let him know.

This story provided to our readers as a public service. We hope you will learn from it. If you have any tips of your own, feel free to email them to us.