

PROBLEM: You are unhappy in your job, but you won't quit until you have a job in hand. How do you put out feelers without jeopardizing your current position?

If you work in an incestuous industry, this can feel like a farmer who is trying to secretly plant seeds in plain sight of nosy neighbors.

Here is one thing you should NOT do:

Other than responding to specific job opportunities, do not use the web to discuss your plans. Once you hit the "send" button you have lost control over distribution. You have lost the ability to deny what you wrote.

Here are two things you SHOULD do:

CREATE A VERBAL "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" MESSAGE

Use face-to-face meetings and telephone discussions to talk about "mission accomplished." Avoid "cry baby talk:"

"Cry Baby talk:" "I hate it here. This place is so awful....."

"Mission Accomplished:" "Four years ago, I came to Company A to accomplish X and Y. I've done that. Now I want to peek out of the fox hole....."

STRUCTURE A KEEP IN TOUCH PROGRAM

One element of your keep in touch program is to volunteer for one externally facing committee of a key professional/trade association. Examples would include marketing/membership, program, and sponsorship committees. This gives you a platform to keep in touch with competing companies without drawing suspicion of your employer.

Go through your electronic rolodex and identify fifty contacts that are the most wired in your industry. On your electronic rolodex, make a secret notation on your calendar every week to call one person on that list. For example, on my Blackberry calendar I can have the word "Nifty" appear once a week on Wednesday at 7:30am. That is my cue to call one person each week on my Nifty Fifty list.

You now structured a method to keep in touch with fifty key people on a yearly basis without spending much time at it.

Make sure your Nifty Fifty get updates about your accomplishments via email. As appropriate HBR articles appear, purchase the articles and email the following message: "I read the attached articles last night and thought you might find them of value."

The idea behind this keep in touch program is to convey the message, "I think about you even when I don't need something from you."

The Nifty Fifty idea comes from James Masciarelli of Power Sills, Inc.

Jim is on my Nifty Fifty list. I'll email this blog to him!!

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