

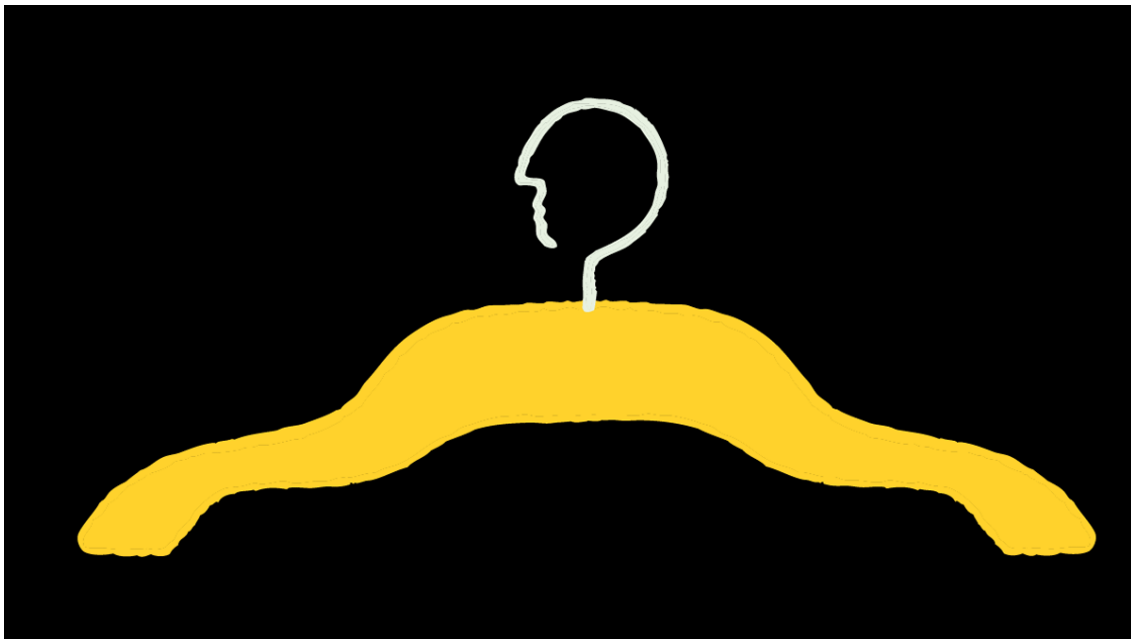
**Harvard
Business
Review**

Careers

How to Use Your LinkedIn Profile to Power a Career Transition

by Jane Heifetz

May 28, 2015



Kenneth Andersson for HBR

Are you raring to change careers? Break into a whole new line of work that makes you leap out of bed, happy to go to work every day? Parlay personal passions into professional endeavors? Or focus on a different clientele, type of product, or service?

We all know the power of LinkedIn for job hunting and networking. But how do we use it to help *change* careers—to make sure we’re found by the right recruiters, hiring managers, colleagues—not ones from our past, but from our future careers?

It’s tempting to create an “everything under the sink” profile that makes you look qualified for both the job you have and the one you want or for a variety of new functions, industries, or roles. But that’ll just confuse your readers and send them running—to others’ LinkedIn pages.

Instead, focus your profile on your new career direction, just as you’ve tailored your resume to specific jobs. In both cases, you highlight your most relevant experiences and minimize or omit the rest. Here’s how to do that on LinkedIn:

Headline. Focus first on your headline. LinkedIn auto-populates this field with your current position, but don’t let it. Instead, use the 120 characters to write your own eye-catching headline.

Why is this so important? If I’m searching for someone like you on LinkedIn, my search results will reveal only your name and headline — and I could easily overlook you. But if you write an irresistible headline, I’ll take the time to click to your entire profile.

Let’s look at how one mid-careerist uses her distinctive headline to attract the right people and opportunities.

Kristi Sullivan’s been a successful marketing executive for over 15 years. While still very committed to her current Marketing VP role, she also wants to add a new direction to her career path: marketing small businesses in the health and wellness industry. *And* she’s a devoted yoga practitioner and instructor. So this is her two-part headline:

Holistic health/yoga instructor, consultant, connector *
Marketing executive for small businesses & nonprofits

She immediately distinguishes herself from other marketers by putting health and yoga first. And she attracts people needing help with their holistic health and yoga businesses.

Check to see how distinctive your headline is by searching LinkedIn for people like you. Kristi found lots of “marketing executives” but no one else with holistic health and yoga in their headlines—a very good sign.

Summary. Now that your headline has attracted the right people, keep them reading. Tell a compelling story and write it in the first person. Unlike resumes, your LinkedIn summary gives you much more space (up to 2000 characters) to highlight past accomplishments and connect them to what you want to do next.

This is especially important if you’ve changed careers before. Craft a cohesive narrative that pulls together what might otherwise appear to be fragmented pieces of your professional past. This will avoid leaving your profile reader wondering what the heck you’re trying to do *now*—or why you appear scattered and unfocused.

Here’s how Kristi accomplishes this. She stitches together three areas of her professional and personal endeavors: marketing small businesses/nonprofits; women’s business success; and holistic health/yoga instruction and business consultation.

She immediately hooks her profile readers with this opening statement:

I am devoted to and excel in three areas—each area strengthening the others: marketing small businesses and nonprofits; women’s business success; and holistic health and yoga. Let me expand a bit on each:

She makes it easy for readers to quickly skim her summary by including headers that call out each of the three areas. And she introduces each area with a sentence that ties it to the others. For example, in the Women’s Business Success section, she connects to her 15 years of marketing at the economic development resource center where she’s been working:

Because I’m passionate about enabling women to make positive differences in the workplace and the economy at large, I launched the Farmington Valley chapter of B.I.G. (Believe, Inspire, Grow).

And then in the Holistic Health/Yoga Instructor and Consultant section, she makes connections to her work in economic development and women’s business by noting:

I see holistic health as a critical component of individuals’, organizations’, and communities’ wellbeing.

Finally, she ends her summary with an invitation to specific types of people:

I'm always interested in hearing from holistic health business owners and women entrepreneurs, as well as economic development professionals. Please contact me via InMail.

Experience. Once you've nailed your headline and summary, tailor each of the positions in your experience section. Here's how:

- Continue to **write in the first person**—to provide continuity with your first-person summary.
- **Focus on accomplishments**, not responsibilities, as you would in any resume or profile. But highlight only the accomplishments most relevant to the new type of work you're seeking. Make those accomplishments concrete by noting the problem you solved, how, and the specific results you generated.

Here's an example of how Kristi focuses on some of her most relevant accomplishments—fund raising, client acquisition, and social media:

I've brought in \$.75M in new funding and over 20 new clients... I established this Connecticut nonprofit's presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, growing its followers by 150% in the first year. I also conceived an e-newsletter, blog and vlog to enhance our social media presence and website...

Recommendations. As with any LinkedIn profile, sparingly add recommendations to selected positions — the ones most relevant to the new type of work you're seeking. Invite one or two people to

recommend you. And don't hesitate to direct their testimonials; you'll make it easier and faster for them, and more effective for you. Tell them exactly the type of positions you're now targeting and the skills you'd like them to highlight.

Images and Media Samples. Again, as with any LinkedIn profile, use images and media samples to draw attention to your most impressive accomplishments. Add them only to the positions you want your new profile readers to focus on. For example, Kristi added her colorful business card to her summary section, a video screen shot and link to her presentation about internal social media strategies, and a photo of her teaching yoga on a stand-up paddleboard.

When you're trying to get into a new line of work you have to prove that you have skills in a new area when you've always focused your career elsewhere. With a targeted profile that catches readers' attention you'll position yourself well to make that change.

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