

# Tapping the Overlooked Power of LinkedIn

*By Don Orlando, MBA, CPRW, JCTC, CCM, CCMC, CJSS, MCD*

*The McLean Group - Montgomery, AL*

*email: dorlando@yourexecutivecareercoach.com*

Here's the good news: LinkedIn (LI) is a gold standard networking platform.

More good news: LI does a terrible job of translating its vision into capabilities that serve its members. That means there is a large market for us to help our clients get all the value they can from LinkedIn.

...LinkedIn does a terrible job...serving its members

What? More good news? Most job seekers, and sadly many career professionals, miss the chance to exploit the previous two ideas to benefit their clients, their practices, and our industry.

They treated LI as an app: a software tool that's supposed to do most of the work for them. If I'm looking for the best hotel in London, I don't care how TripAdvisor sorts and displays the information. I don't have to. I have a simple goal: I want a great place to stay.

LI is not an app. It can be a very powerful instrument in the hands of career professionals. But only when employed thoughtfully.

Some people limit their thoughts to trying to match keywords. That makes some sense. After all, recruiters use key words to search for candidates. It would be shortsighted to ignore key words.

However, it would be deadly if that's where anyone pins all his hopes. Let's help our clients leave the endless tinkering in the never-ending hunt for "key words" to others.

Here's the ideas those obsessed with key words never think about:

- They hope they'll be found. They forget LI has 467,000,000 members. They hope even if one-half of one percent share their career field, they will be found in that group of 2,485,000 people!
- They really don't know what the key words are for certain. Moreover, neither does anybody else. There is no industry standard for search engines and key words. And each search might use different key words.
- Key words might describe traits and responsibilities (another way of saying minimum requirements). But they can't describe capability and potential well.

Let's start by replacing the toxic "conventional wisdom" definition of networking with its true meaning. Networking is not the mutually mortifying ritual whereby our clients impose on every friend, relative, and total stranger to ask each for something none of them can give: a job!

When people think like that, their profiles read like obituaries. ("Are you selling plots in LinkedIn Memorial Gardens?" The Spotlight, pp 4 – 6) Each time I read one such profile I think: poor soul! Isn't it sad he passed away so young.

...most LinkedIn profiles read like obituaries...

Right at the top is their job title. That delivers no value. The best person in any career field may have the same job title as the worst slug any organization had the misfortune to hire.

Such profiles then trot out responsibilities. Those offer little value for the same reason outlined above.

The profile then goes on to list (undocumented) skills. Your clients may not know this, but you certainly do. Anybody, even a complete stranger, can “endorse” anybody else for any skill, even if they’ve never met the person at all.

Nearly all of the other sections take the same approach: laundry lists that seem to be there by obligation, not thoughtful design.

The true definition of networking gets us on the right track:

net.working /'net, werk/ gerund: the natural preference for extending value, without immediately expecting a return and without giving away the store.

When we align our guidance with that thought, we can deliver commanding, value-laden profiles. As we do, we should remember what makes for exceptionally powerful prose. That’s part of what our clients pay us to do.

Who are our audiences? Our first audience is the hiring decision makers. We want to help them deliver on the promise they made to their own bosses. They pledged the next candidate they recommend would make the organization more money than it took to hire that person.

Our second audience are potential members of our clients’ network. We want to give that group confidence our clients are people worth knowing and helping. We want everybody to know that linking with our clients can power their own success.

Writing with power means writing with coherence. Every section of the profile should flow naturally into the next. Having a pattern helps readers make sense of our words. Fortunately, LI provides such an aid in the sections of each profile. It’s up to us to use each wisely.

We must be concise. We use the fewest words that work. We support what we write with examples, quotes, and statistics.

We want our clients to look as good on the net as they do in person. We use the client’s style and tone (not our own) to make the profile sound like people speaking with people. After all, while social media might set the state, real networking can only happen when people speak with people.

We gain all those advantages if we think of LI’s section headings in context.

## THE SUMMARY SECTION

“Summary” is an unfortunate choice for a key element of the profile. It leads clients to summarize their work history. Hiring officials don’t want summaries, too many of which all sound the same. They must see value.

And “brand” is another word for value. Use the summary to expand upon the client’s brand.

Here's an example for a Chief Innovation Officer.

I have the greatest job in the world: I help our company, Acme Equipment Corporation, transform innovation into results. If your company measures success by concentrating on the quarterly bottom line, there's no need for you to read any further.

But if you're still reading, you've just seen the value Acme offers.

If you want your organization to lead the way and dominate markets for a long time into the future, we should talk. I think you'll find not just what we do, but how we do it, of great interest.

My role is to dream with a purpose, a blend of the strategic and the creative. It's more than transforming the mundane into the engaging for the end user. It's guiding stakeholders to see how we, through innovation, add commanding value.

Yes, we're smart at risk-taking. Since shared risk is less risk, I constantly hone my skills in the art and science of building vibrant coalitions of diverse stakeholders. Working together, we become very good at using technology already invented in ways we couldn't imagine when we began.

Iterative prototypes help us succeed. Yes, we sometimes fail. Or, as I like to think of it, we get one step closer to the solution. We combine resiliency with agility.

Many will tell you they focus on the future. But they rarely tell you how they do that. We help spot the difference between fads and emerging trends. Moreover, I help you leverage those faster and better than the competition.

You'll want proof. The first and only step to see that is easy. Email me at [john.doe@gmail.com](mailto:john.doe@gmail.com).

I promise you two things: a quick response, and dedicated time to explore how Acme and I might mitigate any obstacle that stands in the way of your corporate vision.

## THE EXPERIENCE SECTION

LI inadvertently leads our clients astray by calling the next section "Experience." Of course, most job seekers relate that to their résumés. Moreover, you already know ineffective most of those documents are.

But consider the advantage if we apply the true definition of experience: the acquisition and application of wisdom over time!

What a great opportunity to show how our clients have grown in each job. Said another way, this section shows how our clients built their powerful brands described in the Summary section.

Here's another example. This one is a transitioning Marine full colonel whose field is international business development.

### **International Development Officer**

United States Marine Corps

Jan 2013 – Aug 2017 • 4 yrs 5 mos

It was here, in Canberra, while serving as the very first resident U.S. Colonel permanently stationed in the Australian equivalent of the Pentagon that I saw the true power of precisely done, customer-focused communication.

It goes far beyond written documents and formal “presentations.” The insights I gained here served all my “customers,” all our stakeholders, and myself more than we thought possible.

Yes, I spoke the same language as my Australian colleagues and we (almost) looked the same and (kind of) sounded the same. But assuming such superficialities could derail all of our work and leave customers—on both sides of the Pacific—not well served at all.

It was so easy to end a conversation thinking we both had the same expectations. But I took extra steps that made all the difference.

I really listened...and not just from my culture and goals, but from theirs as well. Sometimes, I reflected what I thought I heard my counterparts say. And sometimes we even laughed at how easy it could have been for different expectations to cause problems.

We built more than cooperation. We built mutual trust.

I’ve always worked hard to polish my communications skills. But my experiences “down under” made me a believer in using diversity to great advantage.

Perhaps that’s how I helped save our government \$500M and tripled the resources we gave our customers.

Now I’m ready to put all my hard-won wisdom to work in the private sector.

Does it work? Here’s his recent email:

“On Nov 7, 2017, at 19:51, John Doe <[jdoe15@gmail.com](mailto:jdoe15@gmail.com)> wrote:

- I have turned down over total 20 jobs and 5 flying jobs due to pay not meeting my expectations.

- I have passed 5 preliminary interviews and have in person follows ups coming soon with 4. I turned down the 5th due to pay not where I wanted it.

- For the 4 left: Boeing, Bell, DynCorp, and Lockheed Martin. I have friends at all 4 pushing my name as the right choice.”

## THE HEADLINE

The headline—those 120 characters that appear just below our clients’ picture—are among the first things seen by hiring officials searching for great talent.

You already know most people enter their job title here. Titles are interesting, but value counts.

Writing the headline first is very difficult unless you know the client very, very well. If it is to be coherent with the rest of the profile, if it is to be concise, you must capture the client's brand in a very few words.

That's much easier to do when you've written her résumé and got her approval for the rest of the LI profile you drafted.

Because the headline captures the brand, it can't be a jingle or a catch phrase. It must be a promise of value. Consider this example from a COO client:

"Translating operations into market share...better and faster than the competition"

His brand says his focus not just on maximizing ROI for his company. He expands his view and abilities to guide his company into a superior share of the market..

LinkedIn is a powerful tool that comes with an incomplete, badly thought out, and very hard to use "instruction manual." Your clients sense that. LI confuses many of them. They've found what you find: LI help is incomplete, sometimes out of date, and generally frustrating to use.

Cut through that confusion. Be clients' personal guide to give them all the power LI offers.

And do say a prayer for all those whose obituaries you've read.

