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WORK & LIFE

Job Seekers Get Loud About Their Availability

Covid-19 has eroded the stigma of being unemployed, but recruiters and career coaches are split on whether touting #OpentoWork is good for your career

By [Te-Ping Chen](#) [Follow](#)

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You're looking for a job. Should you advertise your availability on LinkedIn and other social networks?

During the pandemic, hashtags such as #opentowork, #hireme and #ono—open to new opportunities—have lit up social media and networking platforms, as unemployed professionals advertised that they're in the market for work.

It's a marked break from years past, when some job seekers feared that touting their out-of-work status might stigmatize them, says Suzi Owens, a communications director at LinkedIn. The fact that millions of workers have been laid off or resigned during the pandemic, she says, has made many people feel more comfortable sharing.

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In 2020, LinkedIn launched new tools allowing professionals to broadcast their open-for-hire status to anyone who visits their page, including with a green frame reading #OpenToWork that users can add to their profile pictures. More than 10 million people globally have used the function. LinkedIn says its data shows that those who use the photo frame get 40% more messages from recruiters, and are 20% more likely to receive messages from other site members.

Still, recruiters and career coaches disagree on how much candidates should embrace such tactics.

“The data I’ve seen shows a lot of unemployment bias,” says Angela Watts, a Boise, Idaho-based job-search coach and former corporate recruiter for Fortune 500 companies, including grocer Albertsons Cos. and New York Life Insurance Co. In her experience, she says, both pre- and post-pandemic, recruiters often view unemployed job seekers more critically, fearing that they may have suffered from skill decay or personal issues on a job.

Even if the pandemic has ameliorated it to some extent, she says she advises the job seekers she works with against using the hashtag: “I’m not willing to let my clients risk that.”

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Unemployed people tend to struggle more when searching for employment: a 2017 study by the New York Fed, for example, found that while such job seekers sent out 40% of applications sampled, they received only 16% of job offers.

Survey data collected by Indeed this year suggests similar trends. Among hiring decision makers, 77% thought being unemployed might mean a candidate would require more training or support, while 70% thought it suggested an unemployed candidate would be less productive if hired.

Some recruiters, such as Ilana Pinsky, a tech recruiter based in Portland, Ore., say that perspective is out of date.

“I definitely prioritize people who have an #OpentoWork banner because they’ll be more approachable and be more inclined to respond,” she says of recruiting in the Covid-19 era. After nearly two years of the pandemic, she says recruiters need to show more empathy, adding that she has hired one software developer who used the banner.

Before adding #OpentoWork to his LinkedIn profile this month after his short-term program manager job ended, Jesse Lindow, 49 years old, of Pacifica, Calif., briefly wondered whether people would judge him: “You think, is this going to come off as seeming needy? Or will it be like, ‘Oh, no! You’re unemployed? Why’s that?’”

He felt confident his connections knew the quality of his work, he said, and went for it.

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Job seekers should understand that even in today's tight labor market, the utility of hashtags is limited, says Dan Roth, a tech recruiter based in San Diego. He says that at larger companies, most recruiters are using specific job-title keywords as search terms, not searching for general hashtags.

Mr. Roth has experienced it from both sides, he says. As a job seeker during the pandemic, he used the hashtag with mixed results. "I found the only ones that reached out to me because of the banner were jobs I didn't want."

Still, others say they've had success. In Lawrence, Kan., Brian Pandji, 40, posted #OpentoWork on his LinkedIn profile after losing his job this year conducting quality assurance. About half a dozen recruiters reached out, he says, along with people in his network. One of his former colleagues, he says, helped refer him to the health information technology company where he subsequently found work as a business analyst.

"You'd be surprised at how many people respond with support and encouragement," he says.

Roshni Arora, 26, until recently a mortgaging-processing expert at Better.com, says the point of a network is to use it. After being laid off this month, Ms. Arora began using the #OpentoWork hashtag on LinkedIn and received nearly a dozen messages from recruiters in a matter of days, not counting notes from personal contacts.

"#OpentoWork is very normal by now," she says, adding that she didn't worry about the optics.

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