



# UNCOVERING THE ENIGMA OF PASSIVE CANDIDATES: Find Them, Bring Them on Board, and Keep Them Around

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## INTRODUCTION

Many things in this world are a bit of an enigma, and for employers and recruiters, passive candidates are often at the top of that list. Often, employers either don't understand how to maximize their communication with passive candidates, or they disregard them as potential employees altogether. This is unfortunate, because passive candidates are often the key to forming a strong team of employees at your company.

In Q3 2008, nearly one in four workers (24 percent) said they were fearful of layoffs at their firms, according to a CareerBuilder survey conducted among 2,922 hiring managers and HR professionals and 7,960 U.S. employees. With layoffs on the rise – and the fear of layoffs on many employees' minds – there are suddenly many more passive candidates “passively” searching for new opportunities with safer work environments, higher morale, less tension, solid benefits, and job stability.

This white paper examines the several distinctions that separate passive and active job seekers. Our intention is to help you navigate the characteristics, motivations, and behaviors of passive job seekers – and gain the necessary tools to successfully hire and integrate them into your team of talented employees.

### Specifically, this report will:

- Examine the passive job seeker's role in today's job market
- Help you learn and better understand the characteristics and behaviors of the typical passive job seeker
- Discuss how to apply this understanding to attract passive job seekers to your company
- Share tips for preventing your own employees from becoming passive candidates

## DEFINING THE PASSIVE CANDIDATE

The passive job seeker is a different type of job seeker than the typical active job seeker in many ways. Passive candidates are in a prime position; they are currently employed, and they are often selective about their options. They may be just be the hardest-working construction worker, the most creative Web designer, or the savviest public relations executive at their current place of employment.

Consequently, if you're putting all your recruiting eggs in one basket and dismissing these candidates, you're missing out on a huge portion of talented potential employees. The passive job seeker makes up over half of today's work

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force. Although passive candidates may be seeking a job, the methods of approaching and effectively recruiting these candidates vary widely from those of the active candidate.

## MOTIVATIONS AND BEHAVIORS OF THE PASSIVE CANDIDATE

In order to open new doors and score your next star employee, it is important to first understand what makes these candidates take the plunge and apply for a new job. Although specific motivations vary from one candidate to the next, passive job seekers share several key characteristics.

**Passive job seekers may be very happy in their current jobs.** Conversely, they may be absolutely miserable – there's no way to know unless they tell you. Either way, passive candidates are proactive about their career path and would consider changing jobs if the right opportunity came along. One third of workers (32 percent) say they plan to leave their current job within the next two years, and 19 percent plan to leave their jobs within the next year, according to more than 5,000 workers surveyed in CareerBuilder's 2009 U.S Hiring Forecast. Forty-seven percent cite the reason they want to leave as finding a position with better pay and/or career advancement opportunities.

Furthermore, although seven in ten workers say they are satisfied with their jobs, many are always on the lookout for a greener pastures. In fact, 82 percent of workers said while they are not actively looking for a new position, they would be open to one if they came across the right opportunity.

It is wise not to make assumptions about passive job seekers' state of mind one way or the other, but to focus instead on the best ways to get in front of them. Considering the sheer number of passive job seekers in the current job market, you can't afford not to reach out to them regarding your available opportunities. Unlike active job seekers, who may be hunting down that right opportunity day and night, passive job seekers often look for their next opportunity unconventionally – and sporadically.

**Factors that lure passive candidates to greener pastures vary.** Just as some of us like chocolate-peanut butter swirl ice cream and others like frozen yogurt, the factors that encourage passive candidates to casually start looking around for a new job really differ from person to person. They may include desire for more compensation, better growth opportunities, or more robust benefits and educational programs. Passive candidates may also be unhappy with their current manager, work environment, or commute.

It may even just be timing that drives passive candidates to wander; they may decide it's time for a change. As mentioned in No. 1, passive candidates may even be happy in their current jobs, but keeping a proactive eye out. If you have a lot to offer as a potential employer and are able to effectively communicate your opportunities, chances are you are going to strike up more interest from these often elusive candidates.

**Many passive candidates periodically job-search – which means periodic windows of opportunity for you as an employer.** It is common for passive job candidates to do a quick job search about once a month to check for new and interesting opportunities. Often, these candidates search due to particular events, or because of something they hear or read that sparks a sudden desire to search. This “flip of the switch” may be career-related, but also may be a result of an article they read or a casual conversation they have with a friend or family member. Others may enter “search mode” while relaxing at home after a frustrating day at work.

**Consequently, being in front of these candidates on a regular and consistent basis is very important.** This idea is similar to being in front of clients or consumers who may not be in market to buy a product at the moment, but who could be in market at any time. You don't want to disappear from them altogether, because when they are in a position to buy, it will likely happen quickly. You want to be in front of them when it is time, so that they will think of you and not your competitors.

**While candidates may be passive, you must be proactive.** As an employer or recruiter, you must be diligent and creative in reaching these candidates – and often, you must strike first.

This is a key opportunity for you to reach out to those passive candidates and get them to take notice of your business. Getting creative in your recruitment tactics is one of the smartest moves you can make right now. Don't be aggressive or harass candidates, of course, but keep in touch with them from time to time. When that “switch” occurs, they will likely think of you and inquire about a position with your company.

## ATTRACTING THE PASSIVE CANDIDATE

### 1. Understand their motivation

As you are pursuing these candidates, it is important to be aware of their motivators, which may vary considerably. “It's important to understand what makes candidates move,” said Jenny Thomas, CareerBuilder recruiting manager.

For instance, some passive candidates may not get along with their manager. Others might be interested in switching to a completely different industry. Still others might want more compensation. It really depends on the individual. By building a relationship with passive candidates, you will get a better idea of what makes them “move” – giving you a window to present them with opportunities that fall in line with their motivations.

## 2. Keep them informed

Passive candidates, as mentioned previously, are often your top candidates – and they want answers. The more information you can provide about your company or the company you’re recruiting for, the better. Be prepared to sell your company and your diverse offerings and benefits to them. As Thomas notes, it’s easy for managers to get caught up in their own goals, but to successfully reach these candidates, they must focus instead on building mutually rewarding relationships. Ask yourself: *What’s in it for them?*

## 3. Be inquisitive and interested

While you should give passive candidates a rich amount of information about your company or the company you’re recruiting for, it is also important to ask them questions about what it is they are looking for. Ask them about their current role. What is their company like? Are their concerns with location? Money? Company culture? Benefits? Diversity? Ask those in-depth discovery questions, assuming you are at a comfort level with them to do so.

Bottom line: *What do they not have today that they want?* Ideally, by getting to know them better, you will be able to mesh your opportunity with their employer wish list. On the other hand, you may find that your company is not a good fit. But won’t you be glad you found it out before the interview – or before the hire?

Also, keep in mind that while you might not have the right opportunity now, you might later on – and when you do, you will already have built a great relationship with that candidate.

## 4. Keep candidates engaged

It is important to remember that these relationships cannot be built overnight. Like any quality relationship, they must be built on trust and strengthened over time. Keep passive candidates engaged with touch points. Use communication forums to reach out and discuss your company or your industry at large. Send occasional articles about your business, pick up the phone to check

in now and then, or even snail mail some company news or a handwritten “hello” note. Add them to your network on BrightFuse and LinkedIn – and actually network with them. Be accessible. But remember that candidates have lives, too. If you are invasive, candidates will quickly cross you off their potential future employer list. As in any relationship worth maintaining, there is work involved, but if you find a candidate who’s a perfect fit, it is worth your time. Thomas suggests checking in with potential candidates in some form or another roughly every couple of weeks.

“Attracting passive candidates in recruiting comes down to the relationship a candidate builds with an organization. It is a time investment from the recruiter and hiring manager. It is important for both to be involved to understand a candidate’s key drivers and provide them with enough data to compare opportunities effectively. A candidate is going to take an opportunity that is a little better than both their current position and any others they are considering,” Thomas says.

## 5. Extend your ability to reach passive candidates with CareerBuilder

Because they are employed and sensitive to privacy issues, passive job seekers don’t post their resumes on job boards or put themselves on the market in obvious ways. They are also selective and are holding out for their choice employer – not simply anyone who happens to be hiring.

CareerBuilder’s partnership model enables you to marry these two factors to effectively find and connect with passive candidates. Our partnerships, which include industry-specific, niche, and diversity sites in addition to sites such as AOL and MSN, enable us to push people into job search mode because our content reaches them where they work and play. By partnering with CareerBuilder, your company and job opportunities have automatic exposure on all of our 1,700+ partner sites. Consequently, passive candidates everywhere can view your open positions.

## PREVENTING YOUR EMPLOYEES FROM BECOMING PASSIVE CANDIDATES

The desire to find greener pastures with a new employer offering better compensation and career advancement, more flexibility, and more stability commonly drives employees to flock to new opportunities. And while you want to seek out passive candidates to come work with *your* team, you of course don’t want to lose your own quality employees to someone else. How do you keep your employees from running into the arms of other

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employers, and instead keep them engaged and invested in working with your company?

Quite simply, you must remember that while employees work for you, you must also work to keep them happy. Put them in the right environment with the right people, benefits, and career path – and they will stick with you for the long haul. However, if you're not doing anything to make their lives anything other than miserable, they're going to bear the marks of being miserable – and sooner or later, they are going to leave you.

Great office environments can not only boost creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, but they can also promote higher attraction, engagement and retention of your employees. It's important to note that *what* your company does to create a great environment with work/life balance doesn't necessarily have to be elaborate or expensive. Even the simplest thing, like offering a free pizza lunch, build-your-own sundae event, or in-office movie showing can be a fun and social way to break up the monotony of the day. More significant than what you're doing is the fact that you're doing anything at all; your employees are grateful that you're showing that you care about their well-being and happiness.

## ONE LAST WORD

Passive candidates may have unique ways of searching for jobs, but they want many of the same things we all do in our work lives: fair compensation, good benefits, job security, and an encouraging and challenging

environment. By strengthening your understanding of passive candidates, you will be able to more effectively communicate and connect with them – and you just may score your next star employee.

## ABOUT CAREERBUILDER

CareerBuilder is the global leader in human capital solutions, helping companies target and attract their most valuable asset – their people. Its online career site, CareerBuilder.com is the largest in the U.S. with more than 23 million unique visitors, 1 million jobs and 31 million+ resumes. CareerBuilder works with over 300,000 employers, providing resources for everything from employment branding and data analysis to talent acquisition. More than 9,000 Web sites, including 140 newspapers and broadband portals such as MSN and AOL, feature CareerBuilder's proprietary job search technology on their career sites. Owned by Gannett Co., Inc. (NYSE:GCI), Tribune Company, The McClatchy Company (NYSE:MNI) and Microsoft Corp. (Nasdaq: MSFT), CareerBuilder and its subsidiaries operate in the U.S., Europe, Canada and Asia. For more information about CareerBuilder solutions, please call: **1-877-FILL-A-JOB.**

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