

In the Classroom 147

Using LinkedIn in the Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Well, welcome back. Thanks every so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me and it really means a lot to me. This week, we are going to talk a little bit about using LinkedIn in your classroom. When I was at Jamestown Community College, I regularly gave a present called *Does your digital footprint stink?* It focused on using social media as a professional and in the class, I would ask students which social media platforms that they use. YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, all those, and they use most of them but when I asked them if they use LinkedIn, almost no hands ever went up.

Yet for professionals, LinkedIn is the go-to platform. Once again just like reading, you know that students want to be successful in their career, but they're not reading. Students want to be successful as professionals, but they're not in the place where professionals hang out, so there's a huge disconnect. I also noticed that many academic professionals I have come to know also do not have a LinkedIn profile.

I believe we have a responsibility not only to help our students understand the content of our disciplines, but also to help them start their careers. This means they should have a LinkedIn profile. They should start developing a network and learn how to participate as a professional through their profile as members of the LinkedIn community.

We're going to look at this just a little more in depth. First of all, why use LinkedIn? If you're a professional, using LinkedIn is a no-brainer. LinkedIn is a huge database that is indexed by Google. If you want your work to be seen, LinkedIn can magnify your findability and this could help you in all kinds of ways. I know that for academics, professors, typically they have to publish or perish, so they're always looking for individuals to collaborate. LinkedIn can help find those individuals to build those collaboration, or to look for funding sources, or to look for individuals to support programs. LinkedIn is a great place to do those kind of things.

When you publish articles, you naturally want individuals to find those articles and reference those articles in articles they're writing. When you write an article it gets published, you can put a link to it from LinkedIn and talk about your article and it gets more people to see those particular articles. Hey, you should make sure that you are highlighting the great stuff that you're doing through LinkedIn. This will help build opportunities. You may be invited to come out and speak somewhere, doesn't hurt your career. You may be offered an opportunity to co-write an article. Once again, doesn't hurt your career.

There are a lot of opportunities that you can create through your LinkedIn profile. That's the first place that we're going to start. We're going to start at this individual level. First of all, is creating a profile. When you create a profile, it is important that you flesh out your profile, that you try to put as much into your profile as possible while still being succinct and direct, but you want to make sure that you are attending to all the elements that LinkedIn provides. Everything that you add can be found through the LinkedIn search. When working on your profile, try to make it as 100% complete as possible, and LinkedIn will certainly encourage you to complete areas that you have not touched upon.

One of the keys especially working with your students is to understand that LinkedIn is not Facebook. There are a set of expected norms for the LinkedIn platform that are different than Facebook. Basically, LinkedIn is where professionals make connections. Before you really start anything on LinkedIn, the first place you want to start is creating your own professional profile, and your students, they should be building out their professional profile. Here are some key elements to think about. First place is a photo. It should be a professional headshot.

Don't forget to smile, and I have to admit, this is a challenge for me, I'm not one that can put on a smile for the sake of smiling. That's not natural for me, but you want present yourself as a professional. Take photos specifically for LinkedIn. Don't take a photo that you have and cut out Bob to isolate you. You want to make sure that you are creating professional headshot and definitely include the photo.

I see a lot of profiles where the photo is not included, include the profile. If someone is trying to connect with me on LinkedIn and they don't have a photo, I'm not connecting, so definitely have a profile. The next spot is your headline. This is what shows up right below your name. This is where you get to highlight what you're all about. For example, mine says Author of *Read to Succeed*, Director Instructional Technology and Design, Podcaster. That is what my headline says.

That's the first thing that people will see once they get past your name. Additionally, you should create your vanity URL as soon as possible. This is basically personalizing your URL with your name, and I recommend using your name because you're basically branding your individual profile, you're branding yourself and your name is your brand.

That's also within the rules of LinkedIn. Don't try to do it for a different program. There's other ways to do that, just take care of your name.

As I mentioned, this is a vanity URL. It's a link that you can easily share in email messages, put on your website, put in your signature block, all of this. It is something easy to use. You also want to fill out the summary section. This is a section where you can talk about your goals, your intentions. You ideally write it in the first person, but basically you're explaining how you can add value for someone else. How can you help somebody else in their program? What are your passions, but try to frame your passions and skills how you can help someone else.

Why would they want to connect with you? Basically, approaching it as "what's in it for me?" When someone's looking at your profile and they want-- "Do I want to connect?" They're asking themselves, "What's in it for me? Why would I want to connect?" Think of it as your cover letter. When you're writing a cover letter for your resume, you're applying for a job, you're trying to explain why you would be a great fit for that organization. This is a place where you display your expertise. You also want to include all your different work experiences.

This also includes volunteer experiences. Focus on what you were able to accomplish. When thinking about throughout my career, you want to write it in such a way that you did something and here was the result. Think about result base as you're writing this. You want to highlight different skills that you can bring to the table, and if you can do it with multimedia, all the better. If you can include a video highlighting something that you've done, or maybe a PowerPoint presentation, highlight your skills and don't forget, especially for students thinking about internships. Make sure that you include those.

Education, include all your degrees, what your specialties were in those degrees, and you want to certainly get them profiled on LinkedIn. If you are working on a degree, include that. Now naturally, it won't be complete, but you're working on that particular degree. Awards and honors, if you've been recognized for your performance, you should list those accolades on your LinkedIn profile. Another thing that LinkedIn wants you to list are your different skills.

The nice thing about the skills is once they are listed, others can endorse them. They can say, "Yes, I know this individual. They in fact can do that and they're really good at it." They give you basically a plus up on that. After a while, you'll find some skills will be recognized more than others, and that's how other people see you in those particular skills. I mentioned volunteer experiences, volunteer experiences are often unpaid jobs.

Nonetheless, you often provide valuable benefit in the terms of time, talent, and treasure that you give to those different organizations. In many cases, you are providing leadership roles, ensure that you are sharing those experiences just as you would a job and put those in your LinkedIn profiles. Another thing that LinkedIn has a spot for is recommendations. After you get your profile set-up and you start making connections, take time to reach out to your connections and ask for recommendations. Consider them testimonials for your brand.

If you were in a business, you would ask for testimonials, if not, you should. Same thing for recommendations, reach out, ask others for recommendations on how well that you do what you do. This provides social proof when others are looking at your profile and are potentially interested in working with you. Thinking about students, they should be asking for recommendations from employers, teachers, as well as coworkers and classmates. Just have a variety of these recommendations. Once you have completed your profile, you should start joining groups and participating in those groups.

At a minimum, you should join a group that's associated with your College or University and start supporting that particular group. At least stay in connection, but it also opens up the capability to work with alumni from that institution. When looking at different groups to join, think about groups that surround your interests both as a professional and your personal interest. You never know when the next opportunity is going to come from one of those groups or one of those connections. If you're looking for a job in a specific industry, you should participate in groups related to that industry. It will help you identify gap in your personal learning that you need to address as you continue to prepare and develop your career. It also may provide research opportunities, where you see gaps that are available, individuals asking question that may spark an idea where you can build some research around.

Initially, when you join a group, I recommend that you just watch the conversations for a little bit, stock in the background. When you have things of value to add, certainly add them. That will help build your credibility within that group. If you can help others, you become an expert or influencer in that particular domain. Once you have built your profile, joined some groups, now it's time to really think about developing your network. When you're doing this, I would like to caution you not to connect with everyone, evaluate every connection that you want to make. Does this connection help or hinder your personal brand?

When you make a connection, ensure that you send a personal message, don't use the generic one that LinkedIn provides. Try to go ahead and personalize each message. Think about something that this individual has done, where you have a connection, why it would be beneficial to connect with the individual. This means you need to know something about the individual you want to connect with. LinkedIn as you're building these connections, you'll start getting recommendations for other people to connect with.

LinkedIn shows you how you're related to others. It can be a first, second or third degree connection, but the key thing is you can only send messages to first-degree connections or group members. That's why it's important to be part of groups. One way of getting started in building these connections on LinkedIn is your online address book, that you can upload your address book. Then you can go in and pick and choose with whom you want to connect.

Once again, I stress the importance of adding this personal message. After your address book, start looking out to those that have made a difference in your life, like instructors or employers, colleagues, classmates, and go out and see if they have a LinkedIn profile and reach out to them. Knowing their email address, that helps a lot. Also LinkedIn is going to ask you what relationship you have with these individuals. In groups, groups it's cool because once you're part of a group, you can start talking with individuals, just sending messages back and forth to members of a group.

If you want to add them as a connection, you're going to have to reach out and ask them if they would be a connection. If you establish a relationship with somebody in a group, it would certainly be appropriate to try to connect with them and reach out especially if you seem to have a good chemistry. If you want to get recommendations and endorsements, you should go out and provide

recommendations and endorsements. If you think highly of someone and how they work, you can reach out with LinkedIn endorsement or recommendation.

With an endorsement you're simply rating their capability based on the skills that they have available, where a recommendation is you're writing a narrative. You're writing a short paragraph highlighting what this individual's meant to you and what kind of quality experience that you had with this individual. When you start handing these things out, you're going to start seeing some come back in return. This is just something to be aware of, that this is a give-and-take relationship that ideally you're there to help others get to the next level. In return, they will return the favor.

LinkedIn will also provide you with a regular report of when members in your LinkedIn network are doing well. They may have gotten a promotion, it could be a birthday. It could be something that they shared, an article. These are opportunities to strengthen those connections and wish them congratulations, and just keep the connection alive. Another area where you can strengthen your reach in LinkedIn is by adding comment. You can demonstrate that you're a leader in your field by sharing content you have created through your LinkedIn profile.

This could be blog posts, videos, slide shares, podcasts. It could be shared journal articles as they get published. You can also write content directly on LinkedIn that will get immediate visibility from your connections. LinkedIn will also let you know when others have pulled you up in their searches and looked at your profile. Likewise, you can search for others who you want to do research with, or work on other initiatives, get them part of programs that you're creating.

Due to all the possible groups, one can join, this is a powerful tool for professional development that there's always something new to learn. That's really looking at it from an individual, why you would want to do this, the things that you need to do to be successful. I would say probably getting the profile set-up. That's probably the most time-consuming.

The rest of it is, it comes down to just routine maintenance and keeping things going, but we also want to know how to do LinkedIn in the classroom. There's a couple of ways to do this. If you want to develop your students professionally, you should use or include LinkedIn into your instruction.

The first place is set the example, if you want your students to set up LinkedIn profiles, you should set the example and create one of your own because you can be sure that if you're requiring them to create one, they will be trying to hunt you out on LinkedIn to look at yours. Set a good example, that's the first place to start. In the show notes, I have shared a link for a LinkedIn assignment. In this assignment, you can have students create a profile, reach out for recommendations, establish connections, participate in groups and company pages.

This is a good first place to start. Once you have done that, if you choose, you can set up a LinkedIn group that is for your class, you can restrict it to your class, get individuals to join that group and use it as a discussion board that you would use in a learning management system. This is a place where your students can share

artifacts, have discussions. You can also use a group to share events, provide announcements. LinkedIn is a good place, and because you're doing it in LinkedIn, it allows them to build their networks. It allows them go out and see what else is available in LinkedIn through searches.

Speaking of searches, you can use LinkedIn for research base. You can develop assignments that will require students to research LinkedIn, to find articles or establish connections with other experts and possibly do interviews. These students can go ahead and follow these professionals in that desired field and report back to the class on what they found. There are certainly other ways that you can use LinkedIn in the classroom, but those are probably the most common ways that you can do it.

LinkedIn, once again, this is where the professionals hang out, so I would encourage you if you have not done so, go out and create a profile. Start joining groups that are related to your field, or even just personal interests and start adding those connections. If you're out there, feel free to look me up. I will create a link in the show notes with my LinkedIn profile. With that, here's a plug for my book.