



LINKEDIN PROFILE OPTIMIZATION CHECKLIST

PROFILE PHOTO



- Clear, recent and high quality
- Face clearly visible
- Good lighting and uncluttered background
- Expression that feels natural
- Dress for the professional world you want to be part of

BACKGROUND IMAGE



- Reinforces your professional positioning
- Keep important text away from areas that may be obscured
- Use it to signal your expertise, industry or professional focus

HEADLINE



- Go beyond your job title
- Include relevant role, industry and expertise keywords
- Align it with the opportunities you want next
- Avoid vague buzzwords and unsupported claims

ABOUT



- Open with a clear statement about what you do
- Explain the problems you solve or value you create
- Include specific evidence and achievements
- Add relevant keywords naturally
- End with a clear invitation/next step

SKILLS



- Prioritize skills relevant to your current direction
- Include functional, strategic and leadership skills
- Use terminology recognised in your field
- Remove outdated or irrelevant skills

EXPERIENCE



- Prioritize achievements over task lists
- Show the scope and complexity of your work
- Quantify results where possible
- Use other evidence when numbers aren't available

RECOMMENDATIONS



- Ask people who have worked closely with you
- Aim for specific examples rather than generic praise
- Seek different perspectives: manager, colleague, client or team member

YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE HAS FOUR JOBS



A strong LinkedIn profile does more than list where you've worked.
In a matter of seconds, it should help the right people to:



1. Claim your Vanity URL

Your LinkedIn profile has its own public URL.

The default version may contain additional numbers or characters. Customizing it creates a cleaner link that is easier to share on your résumé, email signature, speaker bio, website and other professional materials.

DEFAULT:

www.linkedin.com/in/johndoe-123456789

CUSTOMIZED:

www.linkedin.com/in/johndoe

To change your URL, follow these steps:

1. Under your profile, choose “Edit Profile”.
2. Next to public profile, you’ll see your LinkedIn URL.
3. Click “Edit” to change the URL.
4. To the right, in the “Your public profile” URL dialog box, click “Customize your public profile URL”.
5. Choose a URL that matches your name as closely as possible.
6. Click “Set Custom URL” to save your change.

ACTION

- Check your current LinkedIn URL
- Customize it if needed
- Update the link anywhere you share your professional profile

2. Photo, Banner & Headline

Your photo, banner and headline work together to create your first impression.

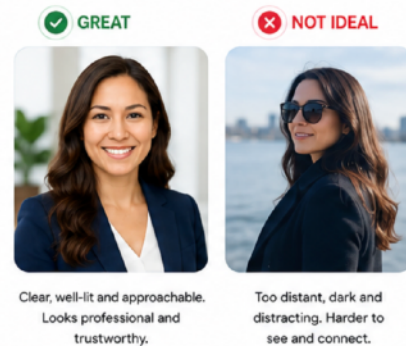
Before someone reads your About section or looks through your experience, these three elements should give them an immediate sense of who you are, what you do and what you want to be known for.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTO

Your profile photo is one of the first signals people notice. Try to avoid looking overly formal or staged. You want to look like a credible, recognizable version of yourself.

Choose a recent, high-quality image with good lighting and a clear view of your face. Avoid distant shots, heavy filters or distracting backgrounds.

Think about the professional environment you're trying to enter or progress within. A lawyer, creative director and software founder may present themselves differently - and that's completely fine.



THE THUMBNAIL TEST: Your photo often appears very small beside comments, messages and search results. Reduce the image to thumbnail size. Can you still clearly recognize yourself? If not, the crop may be too wide or the image too busy.

BACKGROUND BANNER

Your banner is one of the largest visual elements on your profile, yet it's often left blank or filled with a generic skyline. Use it to reinforce what you want to be known for.

Depending on your role and goals, your banner might feature:

- Your area of expertise or professional/business focus
- A simple positioning statement
- Your organization, industry or field

- An image that reflects the world you work in
- Credibility markers, where appropriate
- A clear next step if you run a business or have a portfolio

THE 3-SECOND TEST: Look at your photo, banner and headline together. Within three seconds, could the right person get a sense of:

Who you are?

What professional world you're in?

What you might be valuable for?

Your banner doesn't need to tell your entire life story. Keep it clean, relevant and easy to understand.

COMPELLING HEADLINE

Your headline should do more than repeat your job title or role. It appears across LinkedIn when you comment, connect and show up in search, so use it to help people quickly understand your professional direction, expertise or value.

A useful headline usually combines some of the following:

ROLE + EXPERTISE + VALUE

OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
ROLE-LED [Role] [Specialisation] [Key Areas of Expertise] EXAMPLE Senior Product Manager B2B SaaS AI Products, Growth & Go-to-Market	IMPACT-LED [Role] [Business Impact] [Strategic Strengths] EXAMPLE Finance Director Turning Financial Insight into Better Commercial Decisions Transformation & Strategy	CLIENT-LED Helping [Audience] achieve [Outcome] [Expertise or Credibility] EXAMPLE Helping Healthcare Leaders Build High- Performing Teams Organisational Psychologist & Speaker

QUICK CHECK

- Would the right person understand what I do?
- Am I using language recognised in my field?
- Does my photo feel credible and recognizable?
- Does my banner reinforce my positioning?
- Does my headline reflect where I'm going, not only where I've been?
- Can I support the claims I'm making?

3. About Section

THE FIVE-PART 'ABOUT' SECTION CHEATSHEET

1

CLARITY

What do I do?



OPEN WITH CLARITY

Start with what you do or the professional problem you're interested in solving.

“ I work at the intersection of cybersecurity, risk and business strategy.

FOCUS ON:



✓ What you do

✓ The space you operate in

✓ The problem or opportunity you focus on

2

VALUE

Where do I make a difference?



EXPLAIN YOUR VALUE

What problems do you solve?
Where do you make a difference?

“ My work focuses on helping organisations translate complex security risks into decisions leaders can understand and act on.

FOCUS ON:



✓ Who you help

✓ The problems you solve

✓ The outcomes or impact you create

3

EVIDENCE

What proves it?



ADD EVIDENCE

Support your positioning with experience, scale or achievements.

“ Over the past eight years, I've led projects across financial services and technology, working with cross-functional teams across five markets.

FOCUS ON:



✓ Your experience

✓ Scale, scope or complexity

✓ Achievements and results

✓ Markets, clients or industries

4

DISTINCTION

How do I think or work?

SHOW HOW YOU THINK OR WORK

What distinguishes your approach?

“

I'm particularly interested in making complex ideas simpler, bringing technical and commercial teams together and solving problems before they become expensive.

”

FOCUS ON:

✓ Your approach

✓ What you're known for

✓ How you bring value

✓ Your professional interests or passions

5

NEXT STEP

What am I open to?

MAKE THE NEXT STEP CLEAR

Where appropriate, explain what you're interested in or invite relevant people to connect.

“

I'm always interested in connecting with people working across cybersecurity, digital risk and responsible AI.

”

FOCUS ON:

✓ Who you'd like to connect with

✓ Opportunities you're open to

✓ Topics you're exploring

✓ How people can engage

QUICK TIPS

Use short paragraphs and clear language.

Write in the first person.

Be specific. Avoid jargon.

Focus on value, not just titles.

Keep it authentic. Sound like you.

WRITING PROMPTS

CLARITY

I work in _____. /

My work focuses on _____. /

I help _____ to _____.

VALUE

My work focuses on helping _____ to _____. /

"I help _____ solve _____."

EVIDENCE

Over the past ____ years, I've worked across _____. /

Recent work has included: • _____ • _____ • _____

DISTINCTION

I tend to do my best work when _____. /

I'm particularly known for _____. /

I'm especially interested in _____.

NEXT STEP

I'm always interested in connecting with _____. /

I'm currently interested in opportunities involving _____.

EXAMPLE: FROM GENERIC TO SPECIFIC

BEFORE

I am a results-driven marketing professional with a demonstrated history of working in fast-paced environments. I am passionate about innovation, collaboration and delivering excellent outcomes.

What's missing?

The language sounds positive, but almost anyone could say it. We still don't know:

- What kind of marketing?
- For what type of business?
- What are they particularly good at?
- What have they actually achieved?

AFTER

I work in B2B tech marketing, mostly helping companies explain complex products in a way that customers can actually understand.

Over the past eight years, I've worked across brand strategy, product marketing and go-to-market. I seem to be drawn to the messy projects – the ones with too many stakeholders, a technical product, and a genuinely good idea that nobody has quite figured out how to explain yet.

That's usually where I do my best work: getting into the detail, asking a lot of questions, and eventually finding the simple story hiding underneath all the complexity.

More recently, I've led a multi-market product launch, helped reposition a legacy offer for a new customer segment, and built a content strategy that increased qualified inbound enquiries.

I'm especially interested in B2B technology, AI and the psychology of why people make the decisions they do. And, apparently, why smart companies sometimes make their products much harder to understand than they need to be.

Why this works:

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY DO

Within the first sentence, you understand their field and the value they bring.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A PERSON

It reveals personality without forcing in hobbies or trying too hard to be memorable.

THEY SHOW HOW THEY THINK

You learn that they enjoy complexity, ask questions and look for the simple story underneath the noise. That tells you far more than saying “I’m a strategic thinker.”

THE PROOF FEELS NATURAL

Achievements are woven into the story rather than presented as a list of impressive-sounding claims.

YOU REMEMBER SOMETHING ABOUT THEM

By the end, you associate this person with making complex products easier to understand. That’s a very clear professional association.

EXAMPLE: CAREER TRANSITION

If you’re trying to change direction, your profile needs to build a bridge between what you’ve done and where you’re going. Don’t erase your past experience; translate it.

EXAMPLE

I spent more than a decade leading operational teams before moving into organizational change and transformation.

The shift wasn’t something I’d planned from the beginning. It grew out of a pattern I kept seeing in my work: you can have a great strategy, a detailed implementation plan and plenty of smart people in the room – and still watch a change struggle because the people affected by it don’t understand what’s happening or how they fit into it.

I became increasingly interested in that gap between the plan and what actually happens on the ground. It eventually led me deeper into change management, stakeholder engagement and transformation delivery.

Today, I bring both sides of that experience to my work. I understand the operational reality of trying to keep things moving while everything is changing, but I also know how important it is to bring people with you rather than simply announce a new direction and hope for the best.

Over the years, I’ve led cross-functional initiatives, improved operational processes, worked with senior stakeholders and supported teams through some pretty significant periods of change.

I’m most interested in transformation work where strategy, implementation and people all come together because, in my experience, that’s usually where things get interesting.

4. Experience

TURN YOUR EXPERIENCE INTO EVIDENCE

Your Experience section shouldn't read like a copy-and-paste of your job description. A job description tells people what you were responsible for. Your LinkedIn profile should show what you contributed.

For each important role, include:





5

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Use specific examples and numbers where you can.



Use outcomes that matter:

- Growth
- Efficiency
- Revenue
- Cost savings
- Customer impact
- Team engagement

EXAMPLE



INSTEAD OF

Responsible for managing strategic marketing initiatives.



TRY THIS INSTEAD

Led the strategy and delivery of a multi-market product launch across marketing, sales and product teams, contributing to a **24% increase** in qualified pipeline.



WHY IT WORKS: It shows what you did, the scope of your work and the impact you created. That's what helps you stand out.

YOU DON'T NEED A PERCENTAGE FOR EVERYTHING

Numbers are powerful when they're accurate and meaningful, but impact can also be demonstrated through:

- **SCALE:** Managed a portfolio across seven markets.
- **SPEED:** Reduced reporting time from five days to one.
- **QUALITY:** Improved accuracy and reduced rework across the monthly reporting process.
- **COMPLEXITY:** Coordinated stakeholders across legal, product, sales and technology.
- **RECOGNITION:** Promoted within 18 months and given responsibility for the organization's largest account.
- **REACH:** Developed a new onboarding process adopted across four business units.
- **RISK:** Identified and resolved a process gap before a major system implementation.

EXPERIENCE BULLET STARTERS

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| • Led... | • Launched... | • Delivered... |
| • Built... | • Negotiated... | • Advised... |
| • Created... | • Reduced... | • Transformed... |
| • Improved... | • Increased... | |
| • Redesigned... | • Identified... | |

5. Skills & Endorsements

MAKE YOUR SKILLS SUPPORT YOUR DIRECTION

Your Skills section helps reinforce your professional positioning. The goal isn't to add every skill you've accumulated since your first part-time job.

Build your Three-Layer Skills Profile



6. Education & Certifications

MAKE YOUR CREDENTIALS WORK HARDER

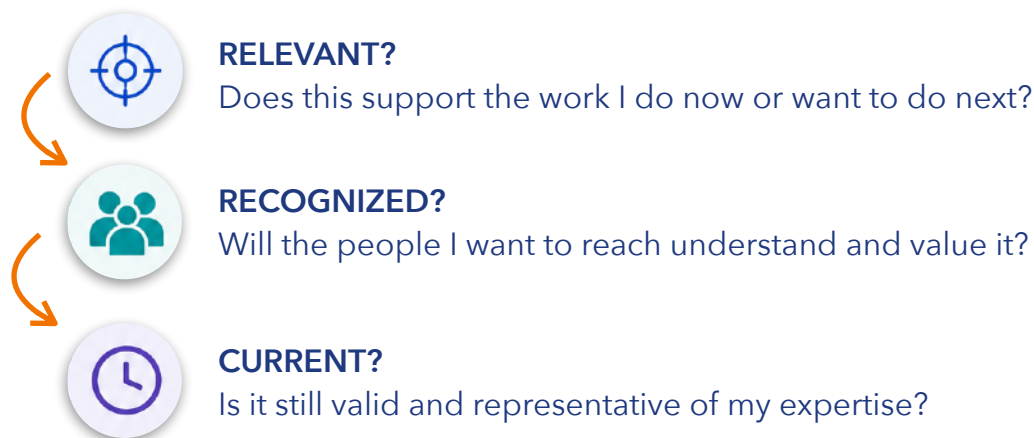
Your education and credentials help provide context for your expertise. But more information isn't always better. Focus attention on the qualifications, licenses, certifications and professional development that support the work you do now – or the direction you're heading next.





The Credibility Filter

Use this filter to decide which credentials to include.



Quick Credential Audit

Look at your profile and ask:

- ☐ Are my most relevant qualifications easy to find?
- ☐ Have I removed or deprioritized credentials that no longer support my direction?
- ☐ Are my licenses and certifications still current?
- ☐ Have I included significant research, projects or publications that strengthen my expertise?
- ☐ Have I added relevant honors, awards or industry contributions?
- ☐ Does each credential help support what I want to be known for now?
- ☐ Am I missing recent professional development that matters in my field?

Your profile isn't an archive of everything you've ever done. Curate the credentials that strengthen the professional story you're telling now.

7. Recommendations

GET RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ACTUALLY STRENGTHEN YOUR PROFILE

Strong recommendations rarely happen by accident. A little thought about who you ask, how you ask and what perspective is missing from your profile can make the difference between generic praise and useful social proof.

You don't need dozens of recommendations. A small range of specific, credible recommendations can help people understand what you're like to work with, the strengths others see in you and the impact you've had.

Six steps to get recommendations that truly strengthen your profile.

1 IDENTIFY THE RIGHT PEOPLE



Choose people who know your work well enough to be specific.

-  **Managers** who can speak to your performance and growth
-  **Colleagues** who have worked alongside you on important projects
-  **Direct reports** who can speak to your leadership
-  **Clients** who have experienced the value of your work
-  **Project partners** who have seen how you collaborate across teams or functions

 Aim for a range of perspectives that show the different sides of how you work.

2 PERSONALIZE THE REQUEST



Don't send the same message to everyone. Remind them how you worked together and why their perspective matters.

EXAMPLE:

“ I really valued working with you on [project], and because you saw my work on [specific area] firsthand, I wondered whether you'd feel comfortable writing a short LinkedIn recommendation. ”

 Keep it personal, specific and sincere.

3 HELP THEM BE SPECIFIC



If they ask, “Of course. What would you like me to mention?”, give them useful context, not a script.

 **IF YOU WORKED FOR THEM**

Perhaps you could mention the [project/team] and what you observed about how I approached [relevant strength].

 **IF YOU WORKED ALONGSIDE THEM**

It would be helpful if you could mention our work together on [project] and your experience of how I contributed to [outcome].

 **IF THEY WERE YOUR CLIENT**

Perhaps you could share the challenge you were facing, what it was like working together and what changed as a result.

 **IF THEY REPORTED TO YOU**

If you're comfortable, you could share your experience of my leadership style and a specific example that stands out to you.

4 FOLLOW UP—WITHOUT MAKING IT AWKWARD



People get busy. A friendly reminder after a week or two is completely reasonable.

EXAMPLE FOLLOW-UP:

“Hi [Name], just a quick follow-up on the LinkedIn recommendation we discussed. I know things get busy, so no rush at all—I just wanted to bring it back to the top of your inbox. Thank you again for offering to do it.”



One reminder is helpful. Persistent follow-ups aren't.

5 EXPRESS GENUINE GRATITUDE



When someone takes the time to write a thoughtful recommendation, thank them personally.

EXAMPLE THANK YOU:

“Thank you so much for taking the time to write this. I really appreciate it—and I especially appreciated what you shared about [specific detail]. It means a lot coming from someone who saw that work firsthand.”



Offer to write a recommendation in return if appropriate, but don't make it a transaction.

6 REVIEW THE OVERALL PICTURE



Look at your recommendations as a collection. Do they tell the right story?

- ✓ Do they come from a useful range of professional relationships?
- ✓ Do they reinforce the strengths I want to be known for?
- ✓ Are there specific examples rather than only general praise?
- ✓ Do they show different sides of how I work?
- ✓ Are at least some of them relevant to the work I'm doing now or want to do next?
- ✓ Do they sound like the actual people who wrote them?



The goal isn't to collect praise. It's to give readers a richer, more credible picture of what it's actually like to work with you.

RECOMMENDATION QUALITY CHECK

Before you feature a recommendation prominently on your profile, check that it includes:

 CONTEXT How you worked together or the situation.	 A SPECIFIC STRENGTH The strength they observed in you.	 AN EXAMPLE A real example or situation.	 AN OUTCOME OR IMPACT The results or impact of your work.	 AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE Words that sound like the actual person wrote it.
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EXAMPLES

✓ STRONG EXAMPLE – KEEPS THE READER READING

“I worked with Alex on a complex product launch across three regions. What stood out was their ability to bring clarity to messy problems and get diverse teams aligned quickly. They asked the right questions, made smart decisions with incomplete information, and kept the project moving. As a result, we launched two weeks ahead of schedule and exceeded our targets by 18%.”

X GENERIC EXAMPLE – EASY TO IGNORE

“Alex is a highly motivated, hard-working professional with excellent communication skills. They are a great team player and always go above and beyond. I highly recommend them for any role.”

Sounds positive, but tells the reader almost nothing specific.

How to request a Recommendation on LinkedIn:

Your request should reflect the relationship you have with the person. A message to a former CEO or client will naturally sound different from one to a colleague you worked with every day.

1. Go to the profile of the **1st-degree connection** you want to ask for a recommendation.
2. Click **More** in the top section of their profile.
3. Select **Request a recommendation**.
4. Choose your **relationship** to the person and your position at the time you worked together.
5. Add a personalized message explaining why you're asking them and, where helpful, reminding them of the work you did together.
6. Click **Send**.

Your connection will receive the request through LinkedIn. If they write a recommendation, you'll be notified and can review it before adding it to your profile.

Examples of how to request a recommendation on LinkedIn.

Formal Request for Recommendation:

I'm updating my LinkedIn profile and wanted to ask whether you'd be comfortable writing a short recommendation based on our work together on [project/team].

I valued the opportunity to work with you, and since you saw my contribution to [specific area] firsthand, I'd appreciate your perspective.

I know these things take time, so I completely understand if you're not able to. If you are, I'd be very grateful.

Thank you for considering it.

Informal Request for Recommendation:

Hi [Name],

I'm finally giving my LinkedIn profile some attention and wanted to ask a small favor. Would you be comfortable writing me a short recommendation based on our work together on [project/team]?

I loved working with you, and I'd especially value your perspective on [specific area].

Completely understand if you don't have the time, but I'd appreciate it if you do.

Thank you!

The goal isn't to collect praise. It's to give someone reading your profile a richer, more credible picture of what it's actually like to work with you.

8. Engagement

A GREAT PROFILE IS ONLY PART OF THE EQUATION

You can optimize every word of your profile, choose the perfect photo and polish your headline until it shines. But LinkedIn is still a professional network.



If you never participate, you're relying on the right people to somehow find your profile on their own. Visibility also comes from joining relevant conversations, building genuine professional relationships and sharing useful ideas and perspectives.

That doesn't mean spending hours online every day or trying to become a full-time content creator. The goal is to participate in ways that feel natural, useful and sustainable.

Start with three simple ways to become more visible: **connect, engage and participate.**



1.

CONNECT WITH INTENTION

A large network isn't necessarily a useful network. Focus on building and maintaining relationships with people who are relevant to your professional world, not only people who can do something for you right now.

Consider connecting with people you've:

- Met at an event or conference
- Worked with on a project
- Learned from
- Had a meaningful conversation with
- Interacted with through comments or discussions
- Been introduced to through a mutual contact
- Discovered through a shared professional interest

When reaching out to someone new, personalize the request where appropriate. Mention the shared context, a specific point of interest or why staying connected makes sense.

Use this formula: CONTEXT + SPECIFICITY + CONNECTION

Personalized Connection Request Examples

1. Connecting with a Colleague

Hi [Name], I realized we're not connected on here! I've really enjoyed working with you on [project/team] and would love to stay in touch.

2. Someone you discover on LinkedIn

Hi [Name], I came across your posts on [topic] and really enjoyed your perspective on [specific idea]. I work in [related area], so I'd love to connect and keep following your work.

3. Speaker at an event

Hi [Name], I heard you speak at [Event] and particularly liked what you said about [idea], specifically [specifics]. It gave me a lot to think about, especially given my work in [area]. I'd love to connect.

4. Leader at your company (who you don't know)

Hi [Name], I'm part of the [team/function] at [Company] and recently worked on [Project], which I know you were involved in overseeing. I enjoyed being part of it and thought I'd reach out and connect.

And remember, networking isn't only about making new connections. Staying in touch with people already in your network can be just as valuable.



2.

ENGAGE, CREATE AND SHARE USEFUL CONTENT

You don't need a complicated content strategy to share something worthwhile. Start with what you're already learning, noticing, solving or questioning in your professional life. **You might share:**

- A lesson from a recent project
- A professional mistake and what it taught you
- An observation about a change in your industry
- A useful framework or process
- Your perspective on a relevant trend
- A question you're exploring
- A practical tip others in your field may find useful
- An article, report or piece of research with your own perspective added

And don't forget to comment. You don't have to create your own posts to become more visible. Thoughtful comments can be one of the simplest ways to join relevant conversations, demonstrate how you think and build familiarity with people in your field.

Move beyond “Great post!” or “So true!” and add something to the conversation. You could:

- Share a relevant example from your experience
- Add a different perspective or nuance
- Explain how you've applied the idea in practice
- Ask a thoughtful question
- Build on one point with an additional insight

Think of a good comment as a mini-post. It should give someone who sees it a small but useful sample of how you think.



PARTICIPATE IN RELEVANT COMMUNITIES

Depending on your industry and goals, relevant professional groups and communities can help you discover new conversations, learn from others and meet people beyond your immediate network. But joining a group isn't the same as participating in one. Look for places where there is genuine discussion, then contribute in the same way you would anywhere else:

- Answer questions when you can help
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Share relevant experience
- Offer useful resources
- Connect with people after meaningful exchanges

Joining a group isn't the same as participating.



Answer questions when you can help



Ask thoughtful questions



Share relevant experience



Offer useful resources



Connect with people after meaningful exchanges

The Power of LinkedIn

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

A strong LinkedIn presence isn't built by completing every field, collecting as many connections as possible and then waiting for opportunity to arrive.

It comes from making it easier for the right people to find you, understand you, believe you and remember you.



FIND YOU: Use the language of your field and participate in the places where relevant people and conversations already are.



UNDERSTAND YOU: Make what you do, where you add value and what you're good at easy to grasp.



BELIEVE YOU: Support your claims with experience, achievements, examples, credentials and the perspectives of people who have worked with you.



REMEMBER YOU: Give people something clear to associate with you: an area of expertise, a professional strength, a useful perspective or simply a distinctive way of thinking about your work.

And you don't have to overhaul everything at once.

Start with the changes that will make the biggest difference. Make your headline clearer. Strengthen one Experience section. Ask for one thoughtful recommendation. Add something useful to a conversation you care about.

Because small improvements can compound. A stronger headline helps the right person find you. A clearer About section helps them understand you. A specific example gives them a reason to believe you. And the way you contribute, connect and share gives them something to remember.

Sometimes, that leads to a conversation. And sometimes, that conversation leads somewhere you couldn't have planned.

That's the real power of LinkedIn: not the profile itself, but what can happen because the right person found it, understood your value and decided to start a conversation.

A Final Note from Shadé:

Your LinkedIn profile isn't about trying to impress everyone. It's about making your real value easier for the right people to see.

You already have the raw material: the experience you've gained, the skills you've built, the problems you've solved and the lessons you've learned along the way. The challenge is learning to recognize that value in yourself, and trust it enough to communicate it clearly.

That's part of self-leadership too: knowing what you bring, being willing to make it visible and taking action on the opportunities that matter to you.

So start somewhere. Make one section clearer. Share one useful idea. Start one conversation.

You never know where it might lead.

Shadé



ABOUT SHADÉ:

Dr. Shadé Zahrai is an award-winning behavioral researcher and leadership strategist who translates psychology and neuroscience into practical tools for confidence, self-leadership and career growth. She works with leading organizations worldwide, and her work has reached millions of professionals globally. She is also the bestselling author of *Big Trust* and creator of the **Self-Leadership Academy**, a research-backed program designed to help people build self-trust, communicate their value and turn their potential into progress.