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Creating Your Resume

Writing an effective resume is a daunting task under the best of circumstances, mostly because most of us don't do it for a living and it is not easy for many to cogently explain themselves in such a formal, structured manner.  It poses an even greater challenge during our present economic times because we are competing for a few select positions in a tight market. People continually ask me, "What should I do to ensure that my resume will be near the top of the pile, when the company prepares to begin interviews". All I can do is give you my thoughts, based upon my 26 years as a search consultant. Resumes are like opinions, everyone has one, and each has its positive and negative qualities. There are any number of books and guides on effective resume writing and there are businesses, which, for a fee, will write your resume from scratch. Any of these should be acceptable avenues. What I am going to discuss in this newsletter, are thoughts and impressions that I have gathered over my career.

Your resume is a marketing tool. It should honestly and accurately portray your experience in such a way as to make its reader want to interview you. That's it, plain and simple. Its link to the interview is that it is a business document where you are allowed (and expected) to "blow your horn", albeit without exaggeration.

It should be printed on a good quality white or buff paper. Use standard letter size. Any oversized documents intended to attract attention, are usually discarded because they won't stack neatly with other resumes or fit in a file.

Two dominant formats or structures are typical. One is the reverse chronological format; the other is the functional format. In the reverse chronology, you discuss your entire work history, from your present or most recent position, all the way back to when you first began your professional career. In the functional resume, people typically present their expertise as a series of bulleted points, with a brief job chronology at the end. I have also seen blends of these two styles.

Almost unanimously, my clients over the years have expressed a strong preference for the reverse chronology style. They expect to see a clearly written document that illustrates your entire career, with all the "holes" (if any exist) explained. They also like to know what people have accomplished and when. Many hiring companies view the functional resume as a means of politely hiding your age, gaps in employment, or job-hopping. A major drawback of the functional format is that unless you date each of your accomplishments, your reader can't map them to a specific job, company or period in time. One page resumes are for trainees only. With the complex issues that contemporary business professionals encounter, anyone with a few years' experience almost by necessity has at least a two page resume. Two to three pages are an acceptable length. If you are fairly senior, the best way to approach this is to emphasize your most recent ten years' experience and then condense your prior history. Depending upon the length of

your career and the number of positions you have held, you can simply have a brief entry for each position you held prior to ten years ago. Here are points to consider:

- You may begin with a brief summary of your career, under your name and contact information, which will be at the top of the first page. Keep it brief. Highlight your strengths or features that make you unique from your contemporaries.

- If you wish to have a technology summary, I feel it is best to place this after your experience. You are marketing the services of a manager and leader, not a programmer. Many senior management positions have technology requirements, but the company is hiring a manager first. As a manager, it is best to showcase your technical skills integrated within your narrative, and then list them later.

- You then begin your reverse chronology. You should show the name of your present company, its location and your dates of employment. If you have held more than one position with this company, list each one, with its specific dates and with a narrative for each. Hiring companies like to see a track record of promotions. Make this chronology go all the way back to when you began your career. Resume screeners become suspicious when your first career entry shows a "Manager" or "Director" title. They automatically assume that you are hiding your age. They become even more aroused if you don't provide the dates of your degree(s). Let's face it; anyone over age forty is in a federally protected age group. Nonetheless, hiring companies seem to find ways to get around this. It's better to show all the facts and not waste your time interviewing with a company that wants a young hot shot for a CIO. By the way, I'm well into this protected age group, too.

- Resume content has to be presented in a direct, straightforward style. With each company/position entry, your reader should see a narrative describing the nature of your employer's business, approximate revenues and have an idea whether it is domestic, global or regional. They should also know where you fit into the company. What are your reporting lines, how many people do you supervise and how large is your scope of operations (budget, equipment, etc.) Under this narrative, should be a series of brief entries or bullet points that showcase your accomplishments. Each of these must illustrate how you either increased revenues or reduced costs and in general added value to your company that is directly related to its success. If you have received any awards or special recognition for your accomplishments, you may either list them with the specific entry.

- If you did not begin your career in IT, but entered from another profession, you can deal with this in a variety of ways. If you were, for example, a Research Chemist, and you are now applying for an IT position in a chemical or pharmaceutical company, you may wish to illustrate some of your earlier experience. On the other hand, I once placed someone who had been a truck driver in his earlier life, who then obtained a BS degree and went on to pursue a successful IT career. He simply accounted for his earlier years with the statement

that between the years of XX and YY, his work was not related to his present career. You have to decide if your previous career experience adds value or gives a unique dimension to your present endeavors. By the way, the client that hired the former truck driver was very impressed by his drive for self-improvement.

- Place your education after your technology summary. List all your degrees with year earned, name of college/university and any academic honors. You don't need to mention that you were President of the Debating Society, etc. If your degree is in progress, be ready to verify it. In all cases you should have a transcript or sheepskin handy. Don't say you have a degree, if you don't. I have seen many careers derailed by this. The ironic part is that sometimes a degree was not necessary for the position, but if the candidate lied, the relationship is over. Some people feel that partial completion of advanced degree programs should be left off the resume, since it can illustrate an inability to deliver on commitments and complete projects. This is very subjective. If you have taken graduate level courses that may have specific job relevance and were precluded by family or other personal issues from completing your degree program, it may make sense to include this information.

- With your formal education, list any professional certifications and designations. Recent vendor and technology training may be included here, but be reasonable. You don't need to list the IBM 360 COBOL course you took in 1978.

- It is generally recommended that you not include marital status, religious/political affiliation, charitable activities, or community involvement. I don't necessarily agree with all of this, but we are in an age of political correctness. If the resume screener has an axe to grind with your religion or political party, you may be eliminated. So too, a high level of community / charitable involvement is unfortunately viewed as a career distraction by some companies. If you feel that these activities help to define you, then leave them in.

I am sure that I have left you with some unanswered questions. As you are aware, it is possible to fill a book with resume advice. Hopefully this will give you some frame of reference. If you have questions about your resume, I would be happy to speak with you at any time.

Thank you very much for your attention and interest. Keep the new members and job leads coming.
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