

Career Coaching International

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WHY MOST RESUMES FAIL TO CONVEY THE RIGHT MESSAGE

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For \$200 any person, weak in writing skills, or otherwise, can get professional assistance to prepare the work resume for a job search. Unfortunately this tweaking of a person's background for presentation to an employer is usually cosmetic at best. It looks good; the grammar is sound, the arrangement is attractive and the information is correct. But that is not enough!

What's wrong with a Factual Well-Written Resume?

A well-written resume can enhance your prospects. And introducing all the facts can provide the reader with accurate information – true. But they are not enough – not by a long shot. This form of tweaking reminds us of our oft-quoted expression that no matter how much you tweak a submarine, it will never be able to fly. Why? It is because you are working from an improbable or even wrong basis.

What does an Employer Want?

What does an employer want? Employers are in a hurry so the first lines of a resume should quickly focus on their job needs. At that point, if the resume is done correctly, the employer will immediately see a fit or non-fit and, thus, no further time will be wasted by the employer (or the applicant). Assuming a fit, then the employer wants information of the ability to meet that need. The resume should provide that verification, accurately and concisely. Now, with the employer's interest piqued, the resume should tell the employer about who you are – your real personality as evidenced by your brief, factual life story (this new type of resume). The employer should be able to understand the character of the individual – honest, determined, and easy-going – whatever is true of you. Finally the resume will illustrate what traditional resumes provide – a list of your past job experiences and training.

Notice that the last item of this ideal resume is the information that traditional resumes put first. So, we are different already

How do we create this special resume – your life story – in the right order, in a way that is not too long, but says enough? Well, the not-too-long part is easy: 2 pages of 12-point type – no less, no more. But an explanation of

the 'enough part' takes a lot more time to outline. It is as follows.

What is enough?

A proper resume, besides having a professional appearance and length should (reference 1):

- Tell a compelling life story
- Grab the reader's immediate attention
- Sequence the reader to become progressively more involved.
- Reflect not only the skills of the individual but also make the personality of the applicant shine through
- Avoid any exaggerations or ambiguities
- Allow for an easy fit between the job need and applicant's skills
- Allow for a positive rejection (a bad job fit serves no one's interests)
- Be easy to adjust to the specific job description

If that is done, hiring managers will be salivating when reading the resume. When the manager invites this person in for an interview it is because the manager has already decided that "this is the person we want." The interview will only serve as a confirmation.

A Compelling Story

A compelling story is told by having the right sequence of events which constantly reinforces the wants of the reader, until by the end of the story, the reader is compelled to take action – to hire you because you fit the immediate need. And the story is complete; it's all there for the reader to see. The hiring interview becomes a formality of a decision already made when reading the life story projected by this resume.

Grab Immediate Attention

The only way to grab the reader's attention is to say something of interest to a reader. What is of interest to a reader of resumes? It is what you do and if it fits what the reader wants, then attention will be riveted on your resume and will continue there until something off-base shows up. So you must state the job you want, clearly enough that any reader understands it and understands if it fits an immediate (and, usually, pain-inducing) requirement.

Sequence the Reader

You sequence the reader by putting the reader's interests first, not your own. Think of how a book is sold in a bookshop. First the title grabs the observer (your job objective). Then the jacket of the book summarizes relevant highlights within the book (your brief factual, relevant highlights). Next, as a potential book buyer, you flip through the book to check certain contents or the writing style – to get to know something about how this author goes about writing of the topic of your interest (factual, understated accomplishments in the resume). Now you buy the book and after you read it, you look at the appendices (for us that is your past job history – not nearly as important as you might think for the first pass, but essential as backup information – hence at the back of the resume).

Let the Personality Shine Through

At this point in our story, the reader of your resume already has determined that your skills fit the requirement. "But who is this person really?" asks the employer. Although it is not easy, you must project to the reader who you really are. Obviously a list of your past jobs and degrees won't cut it. Therefore you have to, in a subtle way, weave your values, your likes and dislikes, your strengths and your weaknesses into the story. Although this is difficult to do, it is absolutely essential because it is from that information that the employer will judge a match to the company or that individual hiring manager's value system. For example, if the employer values high ethical behavior and your resume projects high ethical behavior, there will be an empathetic and emotional reaction to your personality. Since most decisions, including hiring decisions, are emotionally based (with the logical rationale following after) you have to appeal to the employer's emotion. This can work either way. If the employer thinks that people with high ethical values are wimps, that employer will not react positively to your resume. And, just as well; you wouldn't be happy there anyway.

Avoid Ambiguities

Another difficult but essential chore in the resume preparation is to state matters in a factual way so that the reader has no doubt of the veracity of the statement. Instead of writing "Improved efficiency considerably", you must be specific: "Increased production from 10 parts per hour to 22 parts per hour, adding \$2.5 million production output per year to the company".

Never exaggerate in your resume, directly or by implication. "Oversaw a team of professionals" should become: "oversaw 2 engineers and one technician". "Oversaw dozens of workers" should read: "oversaw 22 workers" if 22 is the maximum number that you can be certain that reported to you.

Ensuring the Fit

The only way to make sure that you fit the job requirement is to (a) make a distinct resume for every job to which you apply tailored to the needs of the potential job and (b) go through the job specification, word-by-word and demonstrate how you match (or don't match) each word or phrase. This unique style of cover letter will ensure the fit between the employer and you.

To make this adaptable-resume approach practical, your resume needs to be formatted in such a way with reserve clauses you can draw on in an instant, in order to tailor it to the varying job needs before you – but only when needed. Strong reserve forces will win the battle of the day, as well as the job of the day

Summary

Preparing a resume is not an easy task and it should never be viewed as one – or as a necessary evil. It should instead be seen as a crucial life story – your life story. It has to be done in a way that the reader, upon completing the perusal of the life story, knows who you are and can decide there and then if you are the right kind of person for that company – skill wise and personality wise.

Good luck and good hunting.

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References

(1) Caswell, W., *Manual for Partners*, Sections 1 to 5, CCI Publications, Ottawa ON, 2004

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