5 Resume Strategies That Will Get You Hired

From the Wording to the Format, Think Hard About What Goes on Your Resume

Rosemary Ochoa

The Importance of a Plan

Developing a resume, especially when it's your own, can be a nail-biting experience. Most people do not have to use a resume except every few years so getting the resume ready is not like writing an email – something that is done every day. There are so many different aspects to a great resume -- content, wording, style, format, design -- but most importantly, strategy. The strategy part is where most people miss the boat and fall in the water.

Most job seekers do not consider the audience and instead compose the resume for themselves. Big mistake! A resume should be written for the reader -- the hiring manager, the recruiter, the gatekeeper, the decision-maker, etc. As a job seeker, you are emotionally connected to information in your past so you have a skewed perspective on what should and should not be included in your resume.

Write a Resume for the Reader

I am continually amazed at the information I see which people feel would have some impact on the interview decision -- high school sports activities, hobbies, college club memberships, work experience from 35 years ago, and even physical appearance! The simple truth is these activities or traits hold an emotional place in the mind of the job seeker when in reality the information has no place on an executive resume.

When architecting a resume, it is critical to write the document for the reader. Readers come in various forms and differ throughout the stages of the job search. The first reader is often an admin assistant doing resume searches. The second reader may be a recruiter, an interviewer or management-level human resource professional. These individuals are the ones making the decision to contact you for an interview. The actual hiring decision will be made by someone else or a group of other people; however, if your resume bombs at this first level of reviewers, you will never meet the people who would hire you.

Here are some things to consider when writing for the reader

5. Emotionally Detach Yourself

This is very difficult to do for most people because you are too close to the material to be able to judge effectively what IS important and what is NOT important to the reader. If you find yourself just throwing information into the resume in hopes that something will catch the attention of the reader, you might be suffering from emotional attachment. The prescription is to hire an objective professional.

4. Give the Reader What He/She Wants

Readers want the resume in a certain format -- reverse chronological. No matter who has "sold" you on a functional format -- do not listen! While a functional may make YOU feel better, it is not what the reader wants and you will suffer the consequences.

3. Never Underestimate the Reader

The reader is not dumb so do not think you can hide an elephant in your resume. If you have a large date gap or other potential "red flag" it is much better to handle it head-on that to try to cover it up. Watch the over-the-top flowery wording, too. "Existential thinker" may sound really good to you but will elicit an eye-roll from the reader. Professional but conservative is always a safe bet.

2. The Reader is Not Seeking to Include You

Many people write their resume with only inclusive aims. They want to get as much information, no matter how irrelevant, into the resume because that one little thing may be the ONE thing that turns the tide in their favor. Actually, the reader is seeking to EXCLUDE your resume from consideration. Hiring managers and recruiters are looking at the resume not only for the skills they seek but also for information that might indicate the candidate is a hire risk or a poor fit. The first task facing the reader is to eliminate as many potential candidates as possible and narrow the field. Your resume has to make that first cut or you will not even be considered for the team.

1. The Reader Might Not be Human

In most cases these days, the first hurdle the resume must leap is the computer database search engine. Recruiters use both external and internal database search technology to look for resumes that meet their criteria – 'data mining.' These search engines are given specific keywords for which to search and they crawl the resumes in the database seeking those keywords. Once the database takes a bite of the resume, next up is passing the human test. It is never a bad thing to submit both a scannable version and a human-friendly version.

Meet Their Needs!

It all boils down to knowing the market, knowing what the reader wants to see or needs to see, and being able to create a resume strategy that meets those needs. The purpose of the resume is to get interviews. A resume will not win a job -- only you can do that through a complete, effective presentation throughout the entire process from resume to interview to follow up. The resume can eliminate you as a candidate, though, so it is critical for it to be top-notch from the very start.