

## **The Best Resumes**

### **By Marsha Haigh Arend**

A number of years ago I had a business called Career Starters. I advised people on the best ways to get better jobs or find a job when they had lost one. The thing that struck me most was that no matter how savvy the individual was, he (or she) made mistakes on his resume and cover letter that were no different than those made by most people and those mistakes were precisely the ones that guaranteed the phone would never ring.

As an employer for the last twenty-five years I have found the same darn thing. Nothing has changed. People keep doing the same things that insure that no one will ever follow up with them. I got so annoyed with seeing the same omissions and mistakes over and over again that I actually put together a presentation to get people started down the right road to enable them to generate a resume that would really get results. You can break the cycle and be one of the few who get a call by doing a few simple things when you write your resume and attach your cover letter.

Below are the basics of great resume writing that everyone seeking employment should know.

### **Don't Make Me Work**

I am a busy person. I don't want to spend time figuring out your cutsey format, hunting down your phone number or email address, or looking for the software products you are familiar with. Make it easy on me by limiting your resume to one page and grouping critical contact info in the heading. Summarize your skills at the top of the page using key words instead of burying the information in long sentences.

### **Don't Tell Me You're Perfect (or Almost Perfect)**

I'm not going to believe it anyway and it wastes my time (and annoys me) to read the lies. Don't say you are very smart, the best at something, or single handedly did this or that. (An office manager is not responsible for corporate growth of 35% and a sales rep does not single-handedly generate corporate sales of \$50,000,000 yet I see this kind of garbage on resumes all the time!)

## Don't Hide the Truth

Don't assume I am so stupid I will not notice that you have left off the months from the date ranges you worked. Of course I will notice the gaps and instead of glossing over them I will wonder, "Was he in prison or suffering from mental illness or chronically unemployed?" Answer my unexpressed questions with things like, "I spent three and a half years raising my three small children," or "I had an illness that prevented me from working," or even "I ran my own consulting business or craft business out of my home." If you have a big gap with no good reason, just specify the dates and put "Time off due to family obligations," which can cover just about anything. You can go into detail in the interview!

## Don't Bore Me to Death

I don't want to read about every sniveling detail of every job you ever did. Even if you had a very responsible job, keep it short. If you were V.P. or Operations for a large company, just write: Responsibilities included bottom line responsibility for six of eight corporate profit centers, strategic planning and new product development and expansion into international markets. Supervised 3,700 people in fourteen plants worldwide. That tells me plenty. Remember you are just trying to get an invitation to present your case in person. Just wet their whistle, don't serve them a five-course meal!

## Help Me Paint a Picture

What will make me want to meet you is a sense of what you are really like. I need a face and a personality to go with the name, not just a bunch of sterile facts. Tell me about you. If you play a musical instrument, let me know. Are you an environmental advocate? Do you do marathon running? Do you like to square dance? Are you a pet owner? Do you enjoy traveling with your family? Are you a soccer mom? Do you repair old cars? The more you tell me about you, the more I will feel I know you AND WANT TO KNOW YOU BETTER. This is the most often overlooked portion of the resume. Make it personal. I won't want to meet a bunch of statistics, even if those statistics fill a void in my company. I will want to meet someone who can become part of my corporate team and that means I need to see you as a real person. Always add a small section at the bottom called personal Information & Interests. It will help separate your resume from the rest of the pack.

## Give Me All the Platitudes I Expect

I know some of the things you say may be a bit of a stretch, but tell me anyway. It makes me feel good. Tell me you are dedicated and a hard worker, that you are rarely out sick, and that you love the prospect of working for my company. Tell me that you think the industry my company serves is fascinating and that you consider working for my company a great opportunity to learn. Tell me you are a team player and that you are looking for a long-term relationship with a company that is entrepreneurial and interested in growing. I know that you are saying these things for my benefit, but I like to hear them! It makes me feel good and when I feel good, I pick up the phone and call to schedule an interview with the person who made me feel good. This is why you need to write a cover letter. You need to put the platitudes somewhere, and this is where they go. If you need help, get a friend to help you author the letter. Just make sure you always include a “feel good” cover letter with your resume.

## Get Rid of the Typos

Typos are the kiss of death on any resume. If I spot one, I can't run to the trash can fast enough. Let me repeat this important point. If there is even one typo on the resume, I throw it out regardless of how much I like the candidate. The reason is simple. If I see that you can't get a resume right, I don't expect you to be able to perform a job I give you without error. After all, a resume is supposed to outline your skills and abilities. Don't you know how to proof a single page document? Are you too dumb to turn on spell-check? Don't you have any friends who can spell? If you care about getting a job, care about getting rid of the typos.

## Ask for the Job!!!

The final job of the cover letter that should always accompany your resume is to ASK FOR THE JOB. Be forthright. Say what you want. Employers respect that. End your cover letter with, “I am excited about the prospect of working for your company and would like an opportunity to explain in detail how I can contribute to the growth and prosperity of your business. Please call me to arrange an interview at your earliest convenience. I appreciate both your time and consideration.” Here there is no doubt what you want. You are not some mealy-mouthed person who is indecisive and weak-willed. You are sure of yourself, you are a contributor, and you are sensitive to the requirements of *my* business! Of course I will want to talk to you! These are not magic words. Create your own “ask for the job” words that come from your own heart, because these words need

to strike a genuine cord with the employer and ring with sincerity. It is your last shot to let your resume do its job. Make sure you make the most of it. Times are tough. Jobs are scarce and everything you can do to separate yourself from the mass of emailed resumes bombarding someone's in-box is worth it. Just start with a good resume and give yourself a competitive edge! The power of these simple changes may surprise you.

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