

How to produce a resume that sells

Published in the *Boulder Daily Camera, Business Plus*

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OK, admit it. How many of you have ever had that Hollywood fantasy of standing on a street corner and being discovered by some slick agent, immediately launching you into the upper stratosphere of superstardom?

Most of us carry that same fantasy into our attitudes about the job search. We know how incredible, talented and motivated we are. Surely that high-powered executive shuffling uninterestedly through the stack of resumes on his desk will stop awestruck at yours and jump up and shout “This is the one!”...Well, maybe in the movies.

Of course, we all know lucky people who’ve been hired without even preparing a resume, or by using an old, outdated one. This can be disconcerting for those who place their hard work, money and faith into a good resume; however, by diligently preparing your resume you will have increased ability to get an interview and have a good shot at the job.

People under 35 change jobs on an average of every 18 months. For those over 35, a job change usually occurs every three years. Consequently, there is no such thing as a resume that can be used “as is” indefinitely. Just adding recent jobs to an old resume will rarely gain you an interview, especially if you are changing or modifying your job. You’ve got to prepare a tailored resume for each specific position.

Purpose of a resume

A resume that sells secures you an interview. It acts as a ticket onto the interview stage. Use it as such. *Everything* on it must be brief and direct, suggesting to the perspective interviewer that *you* could best satisfy *their* needs. (You must find out what those needs are.) Not vice versa. It should pique the employer’s interest in you. When the employer’s desire to know more about you is stimulated, you will be called for an interview.

WHAT A RESUME CAN DO: A resume communicates a message about you, like the coming attractions do for a movie. This message needs to impress the audience both in content and in form. Like a coming attraction, your resume must stand out in the crowd, and leave a mark that impresses. Not only can you satisfy the employer’s needs, but you do so in a distinguished and unique way based on your well-packaged resume.

WHAT A RESUME CANNOT DO: Remember that a resume *cannot* get you a job. Nor does it negotiate salary, benefits or job tasks for the position. You must wait for the interview for that.

Contents and format

A resume that sells is brief, focused, and effective. It is job specific. It gives you credit for what you've learned and accomplished, regardless of where, when or for how much money. Keep it simple. No one expects your life story compacted on two pages of paper. It does not include personal information that is irrelevant to the job such as age, marital status, hobbies, height or weight. Neither does it include vague job objectives such as: "A position working with people in a human service field using my people skills in a people environment."

Resume construction

A resume that sells is set up like a pyramid. There is a hierarchy to the structure. Here's how to build it:

1. JOB OBJECTIVE: A job objective should include a job title, preferably the one used in the ad. You can include additional pertinent information as well as the company's name. This is the apex of the pyramid. All resumes should include this. Everything that follows reinforces and supports it. This job objective shows you're not afraid to "hang it out there." If you are concerned about naming your desire, how motivated can you be to enact it? Clearly stating your job objective suggests you know what you have to offer. In a quick glance, the hiring manager/screener can easily determine what you are targeting.

2. QUALIFICATIONS: This is your commercial air time. In four or five bulleted statements, the reader gets the essential points of why s/he should invite you for an interview. In the two or three seconds allotted this "mini-spot," the reader knows your job objective and your best qualifications. If you can win them over here, they'll continue reading for the details.

You may want to include:

- ✓ one significant accomplishment (stated very concisely)
- ✓ one or two outstanding personality assets that will help you excel at the job
- ✓ the number of years you've had professional experience in this field
- ✓ your formal training and credentials
- ✓ a value or personal philosophy which supports your career goals and job objective.

Give yourself permission to be creative and imaginative. Mix and combine the above elements in a way that gives this area vitality.

3. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: What you actually name this section may vary. The important idea here is to organize your skills according to criteria critical to carrying out the job objective. They may come from professional, volunteer or life experiences.

You may wish to draw from any research you've done about skills requirements for the job title. You can also use the skills outlined in the advertisement. Choose three or four areas to categorize your skills. Use titles like Writing/Communications, Marketing/Research and Business Management.

For each of your categories develop three to five action-oriented phrases stating specific results as proof of your experience. Be sure to use words from that particular industry. For example, while "taught" applies to academia, "trained" is the proper verb for corporate settings.

4. WORK HISTORY: Congratulations. Once here, you've crested the hill in the production of a good resume. This section is simply a chronological listing of paid and unpaid positions, beginning with your most recent work.

Dates should be marked by years generally. Delete very short-term employment or combine several into a broader category.

5. EDUCATION: Provide a list of schools you've attended with dates, degrees and honors. Include any personal study, workshops, seminars, classes or certificates you've received.

6. AFFILIATIONS/AWARDS/HONORS: This is an optional section. Only include those relevant to the job objective.

Presentation mechanics

ENVELOPE: This is the external wrapping of your package. The first impression may be made based on it. Its appearance is important. Don't handwrite names and addresses. Use the same quality paper as your resume. Include appropriate names and titles. The attention to details on this "carrier" of your resume should reflect the quality of the resume itself.

TYPE FONT: Select a clear, professional and easy to read font. Use only letter quality printing. Allow for enough "white space" that the reader can easily absorb the information and the resume does not appear crowded.

PAPER SELECTION: The quality should reflect that of the position you are seeking and the personal quality you wish to project. You do not need to go into colors of the rainbow to stand out.

GRAMMER, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Precision in this department is paramount. You are being evaluated based on all of this. Take the time to be meticulously correct.

If you know your skills and enthusiastically research the job of your interest, writing an effective and potent resume will succeed in procuring you a ticket to the interview theater. From there, a possible star may be born, and it may be you.

Nina Friedman is the CEO of Nina Friedman Career Services, a Boulder, Colorado based career counseling/coaching firm she founded in 1983. She has a Masters Degree from Columbia University and is certified in Gestalt therapy and Neurolinguistic Programming. More than 25 years, Nina has helped thousands of people in transition to better understand themselves, maximize their potential, and become gainfully employed with increased success, fulfillment and joy. Her background includes training with Richard Bolles, author of What Color Is Your Parachute?, and doing outplacement work with organizations, including Hughes Aircraft Corporation and Corporate Express. She has also worked on programs for career development within organizations such as IBM and Ball Aerospace Corporation, in addition to executive-level coaching. Nina has lectured on the topic of careers at Colorado and Naropa Universities, been interviewed on television and radio, written columns on career issues for the Business Plus section of the Boulder Daily Camera, and is a parent. She can be reached via email at nina@nfcareers.com or phone at 303.444.5158. For more information check out www.nfcareers.com.