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Résumé writing tips

I'm often asked to critique résumés or for résumé writing advice. While there's no one style that fits everyone, there are certain things I believe are critical to highlight on your résumé. Here are a few tips to help you freshen up your résumé and catch the attention of potential employers.

Visually appealing: Your résumé should be visually appealing, easy to read and contain all the key information on the first page. The reality is most recruiters and HR professionals will only spend about 30 seconds scanning your résumé. Use bullet points, headers, columns, text blocks and bold or italicized fonts to draw the eye to key details. Another trick is to use numbers (dollar figures and percentages) and spell them out completely: $1,000,000 is a lot more eye catching than "$1M" or "one million."

Summary: Start with a strong summary that highlights your skills and abilities. This should be a snapshot of how you would want to describe yourself to a future employer. Be clear and include as much detail as you can, including job title, a summary or value proposition briefly describing your strengths and abilities, and bullet points showing your accomplishments and skills. This is a great area to share exciting career wins, such as meeting all KPIs, starting a new division or product line, turning around an unprofitable office, etc. It's also a great place to highlight the breadth of your skills, including merger and acquisition experience, strategic planning and implementation, business development, training and leadership, as well as advanced degrees or certifications.

Make it easy for the reader: For each position, be sure to include the company name, position title, dates of employment (year only) and a brief company description. This makes it easy for the reader to see what you did and know a little about the company. If you were promoted, list both positions under the company name. This makes it easy for the reader to see your career progression.

Accomplishments are key: The most important thing when you're writing your résumé is to focus on accomplishments for each position, not responsibilities. Highlight items, such as key projects you worked on, ways you saved the company money, ways you increased revenue, how you built or improved customer relationships, etc. Be sure to include numerical specifics. If you're in sales, be sure to also include key accounts.

Solve the pain points: When a hiring manager reads a résumé, he or she is thinking, "Can this person solve the problems I'm facing, meet the needs I have and help to grow this business?" Before you write your résumé, it's critical to know what challenges your target employers are facing and how you can help solve those problems. When the hiring manager reads your résumé, you want him or her to be excited about the potential of what you can do for the company based on your previous accomplishments.

Less is more: One of the most difficult things about writing your résumé is knowing what to say and what to leave out. I recently read a great suggestion: Find a couple of ideal job descriptions online. Highlight the key points that describe you and use these as a basis for writing your résumé, being careful to focus on how you have met or accomplished the requirements.

LinkedIn profile: LinkedIn and your résumé should build off each other. Recruiters and hiring managers will review your LinkedIn profile as part of the prescreening process. You don't want your résumé to state one thing and your LinkedIn profile to state something else. They should both highlight the same skills and have similar summaries. Another key thing with LinkedIn is to request and give recommendations. Recruiters don't normally check references until the end of the interview process; this is a great way for them to hear what others think of you before they even meet you.

Get opinions on your résumé: Ask a few trusted people for feedback on your résumé, using these targeted questions: "Is it clear what I do?" "When you read my résumé, can you tell what I'm great at?" "What position do you think I'm applying for or are qualified for?" Use this feedback to clarify key points in your résumé.