

Resume Writing Advice

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By now you've heard several times that the job market is competitive and it's more important than ever that you stand out to employers through your cover letter and résumé.

Well, you're about to hear it again.

"While it is always important to have a remarkable résumé, a bad economy makes it even more important," says Kathy Sweeney, a certified professional résumé writer for The Write Résumé. "With this situation in mind, it is more important than ever to communicate the value you bring to a potential employer."

Here are a few pearls of wisdom: Communicating your value to an employer is not done by crowding your résumé with phrases like "results driven" or "motivated." It won't be done by listing what you think is an impressive list of job duties, and it sure as heck won't be done by sending out one standard résumé for every application. None of these mistakes will help pave your way for an interview, but you can bet they will aid in digging your career grave.

So what is the easiest way to grab an employer's attention? Simple: Spell things out for them.

"The primary function of a résumé is to get a candidate noticed in an effort to gain interviews," Sweeney says. "It is a marketing document, in which a candidate sells his or her value to the employer. If the meat of the résumé is simply job duties, it will not do the job seeker any favors."

If you need help creating your high-definition résumé, here are five common résumé errors you might be making, and how you can make things crystal clear for employers:

1. You aren't quantifying results

Applicants often don't know the difference between quantifying results and just stating a job responsibility. A job responsibility is something that you do on a daily basis and a quantified achievement is the result of that responsibility, Sweeney says.

"In this tight economy, employers want to know whether you can make or save them money," Sweeney says. "By quantifying results, you show the next employer the results you have been able to obtain, either in dollar figures, percentages or comparative numbers."

To truly impress an employer, you need to highlight situations where you went 'above and beyond' your normal job duties. If you developed a process or procedure that reduced time in completing a certain task, finished a project 10 days ahead of schedule or recommended a way to cut costs, included those in your résumé, Sweeney says. All of these can be calculated out to show dollars saved for an employer.

2. You didn't include keywords

We hear a lot about using keywords in our résumés and letters, but many job seekers just don't get it. They don't know what they are, where to find them or how to include them in their résumé.

Keywords are usually found in the job description for an available position. Keywords are not "team player" or "good communication skills," Sweeney says. Keywords are specific to the position. For an accountant, for example, keywords might include "accounts payable," "accounts receivable" or "month-end reporting."

"The whole goal from an employer's perspective is to drill down to the least amount of candidates possible for interviewing purposes," Sweeney says. "Keywords are utilized to trim down applicants to the most qualified candidates."

3. You buried your achievements

Perhaps you did list some accomplishments on your résumé, but they are mixed in with your job duties. What good is that going to do you? This method will not allow an employer to quickly assess your ability to produce results, which is ultimately why they want to hire you.

"If a candidate buries his achievement in a job description, nothing is going to stand out. A job seeker needs to outline what his duties are, as those are what most often match the job posting," Sweeney says. "On a job posting, you will see duties listed. For instance, 'Candidate will be charged with creating relationships with customers and selling XYZ product line.' However, job postings will never say, 'Must produce at least \$5 million per year in revenue.' While it is important to list that you 'develop relationships and sell products' as a job duty, you need to separate your daily functions from your results, as employers do not want to 'wade through' your job descriptions to identify your achievements."

In order to make your achievements stand out, Sweeney suggests listing the job duties first in paragraph format, and then incorporate a bulleted area below the paragraph entitled "key accomplishments" to list your achievements.

4. You didn't include a summary

Including a summary on your résumé is one of those steps that many job seekers forget to take -- and if they do remember, they usually include the wrong information. Your career summary should portray your experience and emphasize how it will help the prospective employer, Sweeney says. It should be very specific and include explicit industry-related functions, quantifiable achievements or your areas of expertise.

"You will lose an employer's attention if this section is too broad," Sweeney says. "Know the type of position you are targeting and use the keywords that relate to it based upon your background."

5. Your résumé isn't targeted

The best way to make things clear for an employer is to target your résumé to that company and

its open positions. If your résumé is generic, it makes the employer have to guess at the type of position you want.

"Human resources managers do not have time to figure out what position will best suit a candidate," Sweeney says. "Let an employer know where you fit into their company."

You should target all areas of your résumé to match what the employer is asking for -- if nothing else, change the summary, because it will be the first area read by hiring managers, Sweeney says. "Look at what is important in the position posting. Then, tweak your profile and perhaps some of your position descriptions to match your qualifications to the position.