

## Network to Work Meeting

January 2018

### RESOURCE MATERIALS – *RESUME CUSTOMIZATION*

## Showcasing Your Experience the Right Way

### How Older Workers Can Balance Experience with Relevancy

For mature workers, a particular challenge in the job search process is crafting a resume that showcases all they have to offer that is relevant in today's job market, and doing so in a way that doesn't negatively betray one's age.

Traditionally, older workers have often opted for one of two approaches to the development of their resume:

One is the "***I am what I am***" approach. Here they simply update the top of their traditional *chronological resume* with a brief description of their most recent employment. Then they subtract a few lines from the bottom to abbreviate (not eliminate) mention of a job at a company they left a quarter of a century ago.

The opposite approach, often taken out of fear of age bias and professional obsolescence, is the "***I am whatever they want me to be***" approach. In this approach, older job seekers start from scratch, selectively creating a chronology-free professional identity from their past that precisely matches the needs of the hiring company du jour. The result is a *functional resume* that sometimes is far removed from reality.

**Career experts recommend a superior alternative: *The middle path*.** In this approach job seekers highlight on their resumes their greatest accomplishments that are also: (a) relevant to the job they are applying for; and (b) directly address the needs of the potential employer. By framing these accomplishments in terms that will appeal to youthful recruiters and hiring managers, a candidate will automatically appear more youthful.

So spotlighting accomplishments is the name of the game. Here's what you need to know.

#### **1. Employers are looking for success stories.**

It's essential to be able to position yourself as a solution to an organization's problems, as a resource to help them achieve their goals. Highlighting your accomplishments can set you apart from other job candidates and present you as that solution.

Think about your past jobs and activities - what special things did you do that set yourself apart or made the job your own? What distinct things did you do that impressed your boss or customers so that you might be promoted? In what ways did you leave your employers better off than before you worked for them? These accomplishments are the points that really help sell you to an employer — much more so than everyday job duties. Also, as a mature worker, you will also likely have a greater quantity and quality of achievements than will younger workers.

## 2. Accomplishments showcase successes and results.

Accomplishments (also called achievements) are different from abilities, duties, or strengths. Abilities are what you can do, duties are what you (should) have done, and strengths are what you do well.

**The key to writing accomplishments is to focus on results.** The best resumes are *accomplishment-oriented* – focusing on results, and *not responsibility-driven* – focusing on tasks and duties. A simple list of responsibilities, tasks, or included job duties not only says nothing about the individual applicant, it also doesn't grab anyone's attention or set the applicant apart.

Hiring managers and recruiters already know the general responsibilities and day-to-day tasks associated with a position. What they really want to know is how an applicant has been able to contribute to an organization, show initiative, and make a difference to their department or organization. One of the most common mistakes made by job applicants is to construct a resume that simply lists what they have done in previous jobs without pointing to their impact.

## 3. Accomplishments have certain components and may be big or small.

A well written accomplishment will show:

- The specific actions you took in a particular situation;
- The skills and abilities you used to meet a challenge; and
- The results or outcomes you achieved, quantified wherever possible.

A simple statement of a job responsibility like the one that follows doesn't constitute an accomplishment as it lacks a focus on what an applicant has achieved or can offer an employer.

- *"Wrote grant proposals to numerous funding sources to support program."*

Accomplishments are personal and specific; they state concrete actions and results. Therefore, this is **the ideal approach**: To turn the above statement into an accomplishment, show the results and benefits:

- *"Wrote three successful grant applications to private foundations, resulting in funding to serve an additional 100 clients."*

Accomplishments also don't need to be monumental in order to have value on your resume.

- Think of how you have made things better in even a minor way.
  - For example, a human resources clerk might say *"Recommended changes for processing new applications that reduced response time to candidates."*
  - A retail salesperson might say *"Repositioned product displays to move dated merchandise and showcase the newest fashions."*

- Mention how you have been recognized by a supervisor, employer, customer or another stakeholder.
  - For example, a server might say *"Selected as employee of the month based on outstanding customer service."*
  - A supervisor might say *"Recognized during performance review for enhancing staff morale."*
  
- Other examples:
  - An outreach staffer at a local senior center might say: *"Initiated a neighborhood watch program covering a seven-block area. Recruited over 50 volunteers, scheduled shifts, and publicized the effort to the local paper. Crime dropped over 20 percent in the first six months."*
  - A professional storyteller might say: *"Presented 10 storytelling workshops for grade levels K-6 at county schools and public libraries. Trained over 100 after-school group leaders on how to start a storytelling program, resulting in self-sustaining programs at five locations."*

#### **4. Some final pointers for structuring the resume of a mature worker.**

##### **Put accomplishments in a Highlights section:**

Showcase key accomplishments and skills in a separate "Highlights" section located at the beginning of your resume. Do this instead of using terms such as 'seasoned', 'experienced' or 'veteran', etc., to show breadth of your experience. Speak to and focus on these same accomplishments in your job applications and interviews.

##### **Use dates selectively:**

It's okay to use dates in your work history; just limit your work history to the past 10 – 15 years. There's no value to going further back because the work world has changed so much.

Any experience older than 10 – 15 years should be included only if relevant to the job being applied for. It should be listed in a separate category called "Other Experience" but without dates.

Don't use dates in your education section. Some degrees are perceived as having an expiration date. Also, using graduation dates from high school or college may reveal your age.

##### **Promote your Technology Skills**

Whatever your profession, your resume must confront any reservations or concerns the prospective employer may have that you haven't kept up with technology. Therefore, flaunt whatever skills you have – whether it's an impressive list of credentials or a simple mention of an office-productivity software training you've taken. By including the latest programs that you are familiar with – and leaving off out-of-date technology, you're suggesting you are up to date with current technology.

On a related note, be sure your email address doesn't betray your age. Having an email address with AOL or Hotmail will very quickly date you.

# How to Write an Accomplishment Employers will Notice

## 1. Start with Brainstorming.

Before you start customizing your resume, you will want to draw up a list of accomplishments. A good starting point is to brainstorm a list of thoughts and ideas without putting any emphasis on wordsmithing.

**One way to begin this brainstorming** is to identify all of your key skills and traits that make you qualified **for the jobs you want and are applying for**, and then write examples of accomplishments that prove you have these skills and traits.

**A second way to approach brainstorming** is to use the following questions to jog your memory about all the terrific things you have done *in each of your jobs or volunteer experiences*. Try to list some accomplishments that set you apart from other job candidates. **Remember, think in terms of what you did, the skills you used, and the impact of your actions.**

- What special things did you do to set yourself apart or make the job your own?
- How did you do the job better than anyone else did?
- How did you take the initiative? How did you go above and beyond what was asked of you in your job description?
- What special things did you do to impress your boss so that you might be promoted?
- Were you promoted? (Rapid and/or frequent promotions can be especially noteworthy.)
- Did you leave your employers better off than before you worked for them?
- Did you identify and solve any problems?
- Did you develop a new process or system to increase efficiency?
- Did you do something that saved an organization money?
- Did you do something to improve an organization's image to its customers or community?
- Did you win any awards, such as Employee of the Month honors?
- What are you most proud of in each job?
- Is there material you can use from your annual performance reviews? Did you consistently receive high ratings? Any glowing quotes you can use from former employers?
- Have you received any complimentary memos or letters from employers or customers?
- What tangible evidence do you have of accomplishments — publications you've produced, products you've developed, software applications you've written?

## 2. Move on to crafting the accomplishment statement.

Once you have captured your initial ideas of accomplishments, it's time to frame them in an attention grabbing fashion to put on your resume.

Think of framing your accomplishments in this fashion:

- The problem, situation, need or challenge that existed;
- The specific action taken in response, including obstacles overcome & skills / strategies used.
- The results that you produced, quantified where possible in numerical terms.

**Pointers:**

- Use numbers whenever you can—money saved, costs lowered, achieving more with less. The best numbers are in dollars.
- If you can't use dollar amounts, use other measures. Examples: number of people affected, amount of time saved, percent increase in subscriptions or traffic, percent reduction in customer complaints, or similar measures.
- If you can't quantify, use words like "significantly" or "substantially"—as long as this is true.
- Use action words like increased, reduced, enhanced, upgraded, initiated, created, etc.
- Consider the “so-what factor.” For every accomplishment you list, ask yourself, “so what?” Does the item you've listed truly characterize your abilities and your potential for contributing to your next employer's success?
- Make sure each accomplishment is relevant to the type of job you seek.
- Resist the temptation to blow your accomplishments out of proportion. Accomplishments should be measurable whenever possible and always verifiable.

Note that you won't likely use the same accomplishments in every resume as your resume should be tailored for specific positions, so have some in reserve for different types of positions. Also, remember that your volunteer work and education can also be the basis for accomplishments—as long as they relate to the job you want.

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Adapted from:

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