

HOW YOU CAN TRANSFORM YOUR LACKLUSTER RÉSUMÉ INTO A HIGH-PERFORMANCE WINNER

For years now, one of my résumé-writing colleagues has proclaimed: “*If your résumé isn’t a winner, it’s a killer!*” As a veteran professional seeking a promotion or new position, you’re certainly savvy enough to realize that your résumé must be absolutely first-rate! Not only does it need to make a dynamic first impression, it must also differentiate you from the field of competition and showcase your background and expertise, in such a way, that you are recognized as *the* ideal candidate for the job. Also; don’t forget these two often overlooked functions that your résumé should fulfill:

- ⊕ Take some control over the interview process by making sure that you are asked particular questions about your valuable achievements and contributions; ... guarantee that the interviewer ‘*invites you to brag*’.
- ⊕ Your résumé should also function as a ‘*leave-behind sales brochure*’ that helps sell your candidacy to the higher-ups and then seals the deal.

There’s a plethora of résumé how-to articles on the web. The **majority of them fail to mention these following three critical strategies** that will make this vital document compelling *while also* delivering your selling points within a brief amount of time. (Studies show that résumé reviewers spend only 20 seconds or less in determining whether your résumé makes it to the *keeper pile* or is to be tossed into the *circular file*. (Check out my article on [Avoiding The Circular File](#).)

So, re-visit your résumé to ensure that it is mission-ready by asking yourself if it meets these three criteria:

This way, you can guarantee that you are highlighting your expertise and showcasing your accomplishments in a powerful way -- and doing so within a 20-second scan.

#1) Am I giving my targeted audience that which they need, in order to make their hiring decision easier?

- * On the first pass, résumé screeners want to know if this candidate meets the **criteria for hire**; does s/he have the **proper qualifications** and **requisite experience**? Make certain that you convey your suitability **quickly and clearly**. **At this stage of the hiring process your objective is to not be screened out.**
- * Make your résumé persuasive by including **accomplishments** and skills that sell. Pay particular attention to those keywords you tend to see in postings **relevant to your career track**. These are the hot-button attributes that are in high demand for YOUR job market. Additionally, stick with your

"hard" skills--your knowledge-based, technical abilities. Although "soft" skills (personal attributes such as "quick learner, highly motivated," etc.) can be important; résumés need to emphasize and substantiate your proven accomplishments. Throughout the hiring process, *employers have two major, implicit questions*. Your résumé-strategizing-efforts **must** be directed toward answering them:

“What can you do for me?” and

“Why am I better off having you on my team rather than someone else with a similar background and skill set?”

Remember: All employers listen to the same radio station—**W I F M** ‘*right there on your radio dial*’; standing for *What’s In-it For Me?* Your candidacy, for a coveted position, will be *advanced light years ahead* if you successfully and persuasively answer those questions. Make it easy for the employer to select you! Give them ample reason to screen you (your résumé) in!!!

- * Your résumé *must* provide genuine evidence that you excel at what you do. Here is where you get to sell your unique value. (*Sales professionals always know their product’s UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION.*) Prove that you can do the job! You should give examples of achievements and accomplishments and, for **maximum impact**, **quantify** and/or **qualify** them. Make sure that the examples which you provide, not only answer the implicit question, “*Is s/he any good at what s/he does?*”; but also ensures that the interviewer invites you to brag when s/he asks you about some of those examples during the interview. These anecdotes should be written in such a way that the potential employer can easily **visualize you performing well in his/her environment**.

Here’s your opportunity to take some control over:

A) The employer’s first impression of you, ... and

B) *the interview ... before it has even begun!* Re: your bullet point examples ...The more visual, the better! Take advantage of the opportunity to ‘*lead the interviewer by the nose to ensure that certain questions, the ones that invite you to brag about particularly relevant accomplishments will definitely be asked.*’

- * Take the extra time to fine-tune a number of strategically customized résumé versions targeted at the positions for which you are applying. In order to gain maximum benefit from your opportunities, your best strategy is to sell DIRECTLY to the employers’ needs. You absolutely must make sure that you have the exact job title and specific key words included in your résumé. To do less is the same as not even taking aim at your target ... what a waste of effort as well as a career enhancing opportunity. What kind of organization is looking for a *generic job hunter?* (*Is that the kind of company you really want to work for?*) Remember, **employers aren’t looking for someone hunting for a job. They are searching for someone who can help solve their problems, or even better ... prevent those headache-producing problems.** Employers are providing you with their wish list in the ‘qualifications required’ section of the job posting. You need to match this list as closely as possible; otherwise your document will fall short. (There’s no doubt that your competition will be trying to customize *their* résumés.) Consider **that it’s far more effective to send out a few targeted résumés** than a mass of résumés that are *so generic* that they don’t sell your capabilities into any specific employment situation.
- * Take a look at each of the bulleted statements on your résumé and pretend that you’ve never met yourself; aren’t familiar with the organization(s) that you work(ed) for and then ask yourself,

- * “So what? ... Who cares?” “Why is it important that the potential employer knows that you have done particular things?” **Ultimately you want to get at: “What’s the payoff for hiring this candidate?”** By asking these simple questions, you will force yourself to write descriptions that naturally focus your statements on what makes the reader actually care that you performed some action, because you **highlighted** the **results you’ve achieved**. At the same time you’ll be focusing the reader’s attention on what you excel at, and why you’re the best candidate for the job! (You want the decision maker to be thinking “ ... Look at what this candidate did for the previous employer! S/He could certainly do equally-well for my team, if not even better!!” Résumé reviewers want to see your accomplishments and the **results** that they have produced, not just a ‘laundry list’ of responsibilities or job duties. Consequently, focusing on your accomplishments will serve to demonstrate that you are capable of achieving (or surpassing) the goals and initiatives delineated in the job posting.

#2) Is my résumé imaged at the proper level; and does my résumé have the appropriate visual appeal it needs, to make a positive impact?

- * Look at the style and formatting of your document. If you are an experienced manager, your résumé should look the part; and if you’re just getting out of school you just can’t make yourself look like a CEO! A mismatch can lead to your résumé being ‘circular filed’ and sidelining your candidacy before you even get your foot through the door. Does your ‘creative use of multiple fonts’ leave your document looking like a **ransOm note**?
- * **1st Objective: DON’T GET SCREENED OUT!!!** Since most reviewers spend less than twenty seconds to determine whether your résumé will make the keeper pile or the circular file and less than thirty seconds determining whether or not they’ll read your résumé, you *have* to make the best first impression in the shortest amount of time. PLACEMENT and SEQUENCING are vital. This means that statements, which highlight your greatest value to the employer, need to appear right where the reader’s eyes will naturally fall. This is our ‘*prime real estate*’. Whether you have a skills & qualifications column or a list of bulleted statements, be certain to **arrange your skills and examples to reflect the qualification priorities of the stated position.**
- * Make sure your document is “reader friendly” by using an adequately-sized font that is easy on the reader’s eyes, with appropriate use of white space and carefully selected bullets to call attention to your critical skills and accomplishments. Try not to use paragraphs (*even short ones*) to describe your prior work experience. Dense blocks like these bog the reader down, are more difficult to read, and give the reader a feeling of: **why bother?** (*Let me find another résumé ... one that’s easier to read.*) Consider beginning each accomplishment statement with an action verb and remember that using the pronoun ‘I’ too often will make you sound *self-centered* when you **should appear to be employer-oriented.**
- * Make sure that your résumé is **K-W-S: KEY WORD SEARCHABLE.** Your qualifications in a noun format enable your valuable skill set to *set off the bells & whistles* in the employers’ computers. This strategy ensures that your résumé file (for e-transmission) is attractive to the employer’s {ATS} computer. The more hits your résumé file gets, the closer to the top of the stack (in relevancy) it rises. Here’s a great way to **out-perform your competition** before the boss even skims *their* résumés. And for HUMAN eyes, this section will provide a quick ‘*snap shot*’ giving a sense of what this particular candidate brings to the table; both scenarios helping to ensure that your résumé is screened in.
- * You can easily establish how quickly your information is coming across by enlisting a friend to give your résumé the “30-second eyeball scan.” Hand them your document and, in about half a minute’s time, request that they hand it back to you. Then ask, “*What stands out from my résumé? What jumped out at you?*” Their response will bring you real world feedback as to how well your key points are getting across to the reader.

#3) How am I differentiating myself from the competition?

- ★ Be certain that you are presenting yourself as the best qualified candidate for the position throughout your résumé and don't forget to incorporate the value-added that will set you apart from the “*rest of the herd*”.
- ★ Consider curating a few of your very best *results-oriented* achievements into a {*newly created*} first page section entitled “Selected Achievements” or maybe “Career Highlights” ... You should carefully select the more appropriate title.
- ★ *Here is a frequently overlooked strategy:* Add a special section just before your formal education and call it: Ongoing (or Continuing) Professional Development. Then list course and online training you have taken as well as any certificates you have earned. Using this strategic verbiage, as a heading on your résumé, will draw *positive attention*, because "ongoing" suggests a commitment to continual learning--something employers appreciate--and "professional development" puts the icing on the cake by making it absolutely relevant. Then you can reference your commitment to keeping current as you network as well as, during your all-important job interview.

By focusing the reader's attention on your valuable, marketable skills and custom-targeting résumé versions for each job posting / want ad, to demonstrate the added value you'd bring to the position and making your document visually appealing; ... you will be portraying yourself to employers as “*just what the doctor ordered*”. So, ensure your document presents you as the top-rated candidate. This extra effort will go a long way to securing your invitation for that all-important interview. ***And, if you've done a really good job strategizing your résumé, besides getting the interview and taking control of it in advance; it could potentially set the stage to not only help you land the job but obtain a **more attractive job offer**, as well!***

If you feel that you're not up to the task, see how Career Development Resources can put our expertise and 35+ years of experience to the task of engineering your career advancement campaign by calling us at: **(910) 883-5013**

Mark Berkowitz is the owner and President of Career Development Resources, LLC. Changing lives and revolutionizing careers since 1985, Mark provides one-on-one career consulting services, résumé building assistance and guidance to help each client achieve not only job advancement, but lasting and meaningful success in their career path as well. A distinguished figure in his field, Berkowitz is one of the top career builders in the country and has been quoted in dozens of books and publications on the topic of career advancement.

Passionate about empowering others to realize their dreams, Mark served as an executive board member of the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches. He has been helping clients successfully advance in and/or change their careers for over 36 years. With a Masters Degree in Career Development and four specialized certifications (National Certified Career Counselor, Certified Professional Résumé Writer, Int'l Certified Job & Career Transition Coach, and Certified Employment Interview Professional), he is uniquely qualified to help you improve your career situation. A recognized expert in the field, he had not only taught in Graduate Schools and led workshops and seminars, but also trained other counselors. Mark served as chairman of the Certification Board for the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches and was a founding member of the Career Management Alliance (fkn Career Masters Institute). Additionally, he has shared his expertise in effectively utilizing career assessment tools with graduate counseling students from nearby Fordham University, helping to prepare them for their future counseling careers.

Mark connects with clients locally as well as international clients via the internet. He also provides outreach to high school and college students, presenting career planning and job search strategy workshops.

• Highly regarded with résumés, cover letters, and interview strategies showcased in nearly two dozen books.

- Enjoys an INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION as a “Résumé Guru” by members of the Professional Assn. of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches.

You can contact him at 1+ (910) 883-5013 or cardevres1@gmail.com to find out how he can assist you in launching your career into a higher orbit.

See how you can benefit from professional expertise instead of suffering from your career mistakes.