Misconceptions about Resumes

Conventional Wisdom: Resumes get read, resumes get jobs, and there is a right way to write a resume.

New Thinking: A resume is necessary but not sufficient, and a good resume is designed for the reader.

If you think your resume isn't getting the job done for you, it might be because you don't understand resumes. On a regular basis, we encounter three common misconceptions about resumes that get in the way of successfully completing a job search.

Misconception #1: Resumes get read.

Well, they might … eventually. But in order for a resume to get read, it needs to get selected. Put yourself in the shoes of a recruiter or a hiring manager. Your resume comes to them in a big pile of resumes (printed or electronic)—anywhere from 25 to 200 or more—often on a daily basis. Since they are not going to "read" that many resumes, their first step is to figure out what resumes to pay attention to. That means that the first and most important step in the resume process is to get your resume *selected*. If you have ever hired anyone, see if this process resonates with you. You take the group of resumes and start to go through them, sorting them into three categories: Yes, Maybe, No (or directly to the trash). It proceeds like this, with only a few seconds per resume: no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no, no, no, maybe, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, maybe, no, no, no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no. . .

What gets a resume selected? First, obvious fit for the job requirements. Do the key skills and experience jump off the page to the reader? Second, appearance. Is the resume neat, professional, readable, and without spelling mistakes? Third, valued characteristics that set the candidate apart. Does the candidate have a background at a prestigious company, outstanding education, clear record of accomplishments, and logical career progression? To see how "selectable" your resume is, try this test. Put your resume on your desk. Glance at it. What do you see? Would you pick it out of a pile of 50 resumes to read?

A similar process takes place when a recruiter electronically sorts through resumes received from postings or in searching databases, albeit with more emphasis on pre-selected keywords that show up "in context" in the body of the resume. Either way, you still have to get selected first.

Misconception #2: Resumes get jobs.

If we had a dollar for every person who told us, "I've sent out lots of resumes, but I haven't gotten any calls," we'd be very rich indeed. *Resumes do not get jobs.* Your resume helps you get a job. In sales, a brochure is a key piece of marketing collateral. The dictionary defines collateral as "additional to and in support of something; accompanying or additional but secondary." The point is that when you are looking for a job, you are the product, and your resume is your marketing collateral. How much do you think you would sell by simply dropping off a 12-page glossy brochure? In effect, that is what you are doing when you just send out your resume.

You still need a good resume. Your resume, done properly, may get someone's attention. But more likely, you need to get someone's attention, and then back it up with your resume. That's when they are ready to dig into the details. What does get jobs is effective networking, a well-planned, well-executed job search, good interviewing skills, and a great professional self-presentation. Yes, having a good resume is essential to the process but not sufficient.

Some people may need to have a bio in addition to a resume. A bio is also marketing collateral and serves as a lead-in document. It is an interest-getter that is especially useful in the networking process. In initial sales calls, the representative often starts with a short introductory or "leave behind" flyer—just enough to cover the highlights—because until he or she has the customer's interest in the product or service, there is absolutely no interest in the detailed features.

Do you see the parallel with your resume and bio? Do you need to change your approach?

Misconception #3: There is a right way to write a resume.

Everyone is an expert when it comes to resumes. Every recruiter, hiring manager, career consultant, author, and your older brother all believe they have the one magic formula. No matter what anyone tells you, they have not been handed the "truth." There is no magic formula. But common sense helps.

Common sense tells us that no matter what you believe or anyone else tells you about resume writing, the person who has the job has the final word. You want to get hired, not win a contest about the correct way to write a resume. If you know or find out that a recruiter or hiring manager wants a one-page resume, write a one-page resume.

Here are a few common sense guidelines for resumes:

1. Use a standard font in an easily readable point size.

2. Make your name big enough to be picked out of a stack of papers.

3. Leave 1-inch margins all the way around.

4. Include your name and page number—contact information optional—on any pages after the first page. If your name is not on the second or subsequent pages and printed pages get separated—for example, at the copier—there is no way for the lost pages to get re-attached correctly.

5. Depending on your audience and work history, your resume may be 1 to 3 pages. Just make sure that what's on all the pages adds real value.

6. Create an easy-to-read "unformatted" (often called "text") version for uploading to Internet job postings and other places where the resume will go into a large, searchable database.

7. For hard copy, good quality white or ivory paper makes the best professional presentation. Make sure the color is light enough to copy well.

8. No spelling mistakes.

9. Use a positioning summary followed by a simple chronological format. No one will read your resume if they have to work too hard to piece it together. Watch an experienced recruiter. They go to the most recent job and start reading there. If your job information doesn't start until page two, you have wasted an entire page of prime real estate.

These guidelines reflect our understanding, at this moment in time, of effective resume design. Changes in the job market, technology, regulations, and hiring company processes continue to shape and inform our recommendations. There are also many opinions as to the best practices for resumes, and no one has the only right answer. Not even us.

Excerpted from *Be Smart: Sail Past the Hazards of Conventional Career Advice*, available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle versions. You can contact the authors at:

Paula Asinof | **www.yellowbrickpath.com** | 214-526-8690
Mina Brown | **www.positivecoach.com** | 972-733-9963