

Resume Writing Tips – All Disciplines

What is a resume? Seems like a simple enough question but coming from the world of Professional Staffing the straight – forward answer is that it's simply a means to an interview. Below are some tips which I've found helpful in an effort to increase the odds of getting considered for that interview. Some things to avoid

The trained eye of a Recruiter or HR Professional who spends a significant amount of their time looking at 100s of resumes a day can screen in or out a potential candidate with a quick 5 second screening, so how do you make it to the 10 second mark for further consideration?

First and Foremost, after screening candidates for several years at all levels across multiple functional areas I can tell you that there are a **2 golden rules** from my perspective that rule a candidate in or out immediately: **Consistency in Formatting and Spelling/Phrasing.**

To many, these may seem obvious or even insignificant to the 'splitting hairs' level. I can tell you first hand that I've seen qualified candidates ruled out simply based on these errors.

1) **Consistency in Formatting** – again, seems simple enough and maybe even overly obvious but in this market, in any market, you must make the effort to screen your resume for consistency in formatting prior to any submittal. Don't get passed over on a sloppy error. No matter how exaggerated this may appear to be, it does speak to a certain level of detail orientation.

Over the years as a Professional Recruiter, I have coached people on this somewhat simple concept but the untrained recruiter or the Hiring Manager or HR Manager whom you present to may not be so forgiving or advise on such a simple concept. I've seen resumes that are ½ page Times New Roman and ½ page Arial. Some Job Titles are bolded, some are italicized. I've seen dates presented in multiple formats on resumes as well...i.e.: 07/2006 through June 2008. Be sure that you are consistent.

2) **Spelling and Phrasing** – again, seems simple enough but screen through your resume and don't rely 100% on spell check as it cannot differentiate on such a common simple error as mistyping 'their' instead of 'there'. In any environment and especially in today's challenging workplace, don't be ruled out on such a simple and controllable mistake. In regards to phrasing stay consistent on the tense you use:

For example:

- Documented and analyzed findings for reporting to Executive Board.
- Analyze and report monthly metrics to Senior Sales Managers

If the prior 2 bullets were found in a particular resume, you'll notice the first is written in the past tense and the 2nd in the present. There is no right or wrong answer as which to use when listing responsibilities and accomplishments, just be consistent.

In Addition to the 2 aforementioned golden rules of resume writing there are a few additional things that I would recommend to better increase your chances of winning that interview.

Why would anyone hire you? With all due respect to your ability and all that you have accomplished in your career, this is one of the questions that I ask of all my candidates. What separates you versus those folks that have similar years, industry, functional, educational and possess the same certifications you have? Having the proper skill set just isn't enough anymore, but standing apart from the others will better increase your chances for consideration.

Marketing 101 is: how do you differentiate yourself, what's your 'value add'? As someone who has excelled in the field of Professional Staffing, I have to answer this question daily in the most

challenging job market since the Great Depression. I'm consistently asked 'why would I pay you with so many candidates available today?' My answer: I provide a value added, time saving service that trumps the cost associated with my service versus the process of screening and interviewing 100s of resumes that are the result of job postings. I have to consistently substantiate and back my past results and experience to win new business and continue to provide for my client base. You need to take the same approach and ask yourself why?

The Approach I've advised over the years to differentiate yourself comes in two forms: MSA and Specific Accomplishments. Incorporating these into your resume will set you apart and are things that are specific and go beyond the duties assigned in a particular role.

- **MSA (Made, Saved, Achieved)** – the most obvious of these are cost savings, created efficiencies, quantifiable results that netted your employer a time or financial savings. To communicate these you'll need to get your facts in order and make sure that you do not make exaggerated claims that you are prepared to have your MSA backed up and substantiated via references. Additionally, provide some insight as to the 'how; not just the 'what'

What not to do using MSA: don't make false claims you cannot substantiate. It's a tremendous amount of wasted time throughout the process and if you are lucky enough to slide through the process, you will be called out eventually. It's a no win and not necessary.

Presenting MSA – A straight – forward example of a cost savings you assisted on or implemented at your previous employer can be quantified and to the point without having to offer up a 3 paragraph explanation:

Example MSA:

- Co-chaired committee to identify wasteful spending within sales organization. Implemented changes to reporting expenses and defined a process to completely eliminate possibility of multiple expense payouts resulting in an estimated \$30,000 annual savings while not negatively impacting sales productivity.
- *This is a solid example of what and how and though there is a lot more to the process of findings and implementation it offers a value add to a potential employer.*

As the above example speaks from an Accounting and Finance perspective, quantifying and identifying MSA from a different functional vantage point such as Operations, Technology, more Jr level roles that don't offer the opportunity to produce solid MSA can be more challenging. For a free consultation on your resume please reach out to me direct at 630 546 2834. E-mailing your resume prior would be beneficial, email direct to dsladek@lincolnsearch.com

Contract Employees: MSA is as crucial and in some instances more crucial when employers look to add head count on a temporary or project basis. Having solid examples of not only your functional responsibilities but of meeting budgets, timelines, contributing to specific projects, implementations, etcetera is often the difference in being considered or not.

Why are you looking, explain your movement, why so jumpy? One of the greatest challenges to overcome when being screened by a potential hiring manager or HR representatives is overcoming apparent 'jumpiness' or 'job-hopping'. One of the first lessons that I learned in Agency Staffing is that you can't judge a book by its cover and there is a reason behind most movement that steps outside of stereotyping a potential candidate as a 'job hopper'. How do you overcome this? When working with a Recruiter, if you have a seasoned Recruiter, they'll have the relationship in place and be able to present the reasons behind your movement to secure an interview. What about when you're not being represented by a Recruiter?

For individuals that focus on a contract approach in the marketplace, this is a pretty straight – forward answer. List in the role that it was a contract opportunity.

For candidates who have from time to time contracted between Full – Time roles, you must list and differentiate the contract otherwise it can appear that you spent 3 years at XYZ and then jumped ship after only 4 months at ABC Company.

For those who have seen an unfortunate set of circumstances such as Acquisition, De-Centralizing or Centralizing of roles, Changes in Management/Approach or Culture sometimes a brief stay in a role is out of your control. Whether to present the reasons behind a brief stay (under 2 years) with a certain organization is always up for debate. When marketing yourself blindly to an unknown recipient (job boards, postings, etc) this provides more of a challenge.

Presenting just a quick excerpt on any roles that appear jumpy, wedged below the organization, location and title can be useful. Choosing your words wisely is paramount:

Example where you were hired on by Manager X who resigned 6 months in and Manager Y came in and presented a cultural challenge:

Do:

Senior .net Developer ABC Company Chicago, IL 01/2008 – 11/2008
Left organization as result of change in direct leadership resulting in cultural change

Do NOT:

Senior .net Developer ABC Company Chicago, IL 01/2008 – 11/2008
Left company because old boss was great, new boss was a jerk full of empty promises

You get the gist.

As mentioned this is up for debate as how to present, or if to present in a resume, but when blindly submitting via the job boards this is sometimes the only opportunity you have to alleviate that concern. Again for advice on how to present these changes whether they were cultural in nature, based on M&A or outsourcing, feel free to send your resume to me direct at dsladek@lincolnsearch.com or contact me directly at 630 546 2834.

Other Tid Bits:

- **List current and past roles in reverse chronological order** starting with your most current or present role. I've seen resumes that start in 2000 and I have to screen through 2-3 pages to find out most recent/ current employment. Again, maybe splitting hairs but this is the generally accepted presentation.
- Provide some insight into **Industry and Revenue** as this will often times provide candidates further consideration and may be more relevant to the role: For Example:

Senior Analyst ABC Company Chicago, IL 01/2008 – 11/2008
ABC Company is a 300 Million Dollar Division of 2 Billion Dollar Global Widget manufacturer XYZ company.

- *Job Responsibility 1*
- *Job Responsibility 2*
- *MSA*
- *MSA*
- *Job Responsibility 3*
- *Etc.*

- **Functional Versus Chronological Resume?** Another topic up for debate, ask 50 people and you'll get 25 for and 25 against. Speaking first hand I can tell you that my preference has always been a clearly stated chronological resume utilizing the advice above regarding MSA, addressing any potential jumpiness, clearly stating primary responsibilities.

For Technology candidates, especially those with a deep background in consulting and contract work, a functional resume is sometimes a better option. Breaking out Platforms, OS, Applications, Programming Languages, Tools can be helpful in sorting through a candidate's viability for a specific role. In Direct Hire Scenarios this can work against you in allowing the potential employer to narrow in on specific responsibilities in prior Full – Time roles. Prepare multiple resumes, early in my career where I stood at the cross – roads of Accounting, Financial Analysis, Technology and Finance Staffing I had 3 resumes prepared that addressed each dependent on the type of role that interested me. Having a functional and chronological resume will not hurt. Presenting the functional to contract or project based opportunities can be helpful, by default, submitting both should not hurt.

- **How many pages should my resume be?** – Again a topic up for debate. Personally I've never subscribed to the 1 page rule that so many subscribe to. Of course there is an exception to every rule. For those who have limited experience or who have only had 1 or 2 jobs thus far in their career, 1 page should provide plenty of room. A good balance or the approach of 2-3 roles per page is a good general rule to apply. Listing everything you've ever done can be cumbersome to read through and can blur the accomplishments and primary responsibilities that you should be focusing on.

- **Do Not Disclose Salary Requirements** when submitting to a particular role, do not list salaries in your resume– for multiple reasons: You don't want to price yourself out of consideration especially in instances where salary is secondary to other motivations such as location, culture, growth potential. As important, you don't want to undersell yourself in the marketplace. In today's economy there is a fine line between being competitively priced, underselling yourself and out-pricing yourself. Though Employer's realize with today's candidate availability their primary responsibility, in addition to being cost conscience, is to add the best talent on the marketplace to position their team for the economic recovery. You have to be flexible in today's market and understand that the normal 5-12% jump in compensation to make a move is a thing of the past in a lot of cases. Total compensation including benefits has to factor in as does today's competitive candidate landscape. Underselling yourself can give an air of desperation and could cause as much harm in not securing a role. Though some of this touches beyond resume and fast forwards to interview and potential offer, this is where a Recruiter who is successful can assist in making sure that the best offer is obtained without losing out on an opportunity. For further clarification on how to address the salary issue, feel free to contact me directly at 630 546 2834 or at dsladek@lincolnsearch.com

- **Should I list an objective?** – Personally I have not witnessed a case where not clearly stating an objective has hurt a potential candidate. Moreover I have not seen a case where stating it has hurt a potential candidate either.

If you do list an objective:

Be aware of phrasing and intention. To state ' A job that will allow me to pay my bills' will probably be overlooked as candidate's who are primarily money – motivated are the most apt to jump ship for the next best offer. ' An opportunity that affords me the ability to utilize my technical expertise in a nurturing and mentoring environment' is better suited.

Additionally if you choose to list an objective, **make sure that it aligns with what the organization and opportunity offer.** Simplest example is to make sure the title and

level of role align with your objective. I've seen individuals that mass email resumes to everything that matches a simple keyword internet search with no concern for the role. Great example of a professional with a very impressive background managing and building teams with some very large name, recognized companies whose objective read '...to obtain an opportunity in Senior/Executive level management with a Fortune 500 organization....'. Not an issue in and of itself except the fact that he replied to 3 entry – level opportunities that I was handling.

About the Author: *David Sladek has showed a career of success and fast – track progression with some of the larger names in Agency Staffing. He has successfully hired/mentored and trained over 150 Staffing Professionals in the Midwest and has been part of process improvement, implementation of strategy and training on the national level with those same organizations. As a producer / networker who has maintained touch with clients and candidates throughout his roles he has successfully placed 100s of individuals in both Direct Placement and Contract Opportunities.*

Additionally David has consulted 1000s of candidates at all levels and takes a true, value added/partnering approach in an effort to provide the best possible positioning for candidates whether he directly placed them or if they secure employment via other means. David is a Career Consultant and knows the Chicago job market landscape and does not subscribe to the numbers game, 'churn and burn', 'place 'em and forget 'em, mentality so many sub – par Recruiters apply to the business.

His approach to the market, partnering style with Candidates and Clients alike has allowed him to endure throughout any type of market condition.

The above opinions are presented as a tool, and not the end all, do all to resume writing. It is the combined perspective from a successful Recruiter who has coached, mentored and consulted 1000s of candidates throughout his staffing career as well as some of the biggest nationally and globally recognized leaders in Professional Staffing. We provide no guarantees of placement or interviews.

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