

The Myth of the Perfect Resume

By
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The job market is collapsing and the number of job seekers is climbing. That means more and more of you are scrambling to put together a resume. If you haven't been keeping your resume current, you may be starting from scratch. Before you do, I want to share with you some ideas that may help you build a story about yourself so you will stand out in the marketplace.

First, let me tell you about John. John owns his own business and has recently gone back to a very prestigious university for an Executive MBA. He's also decided that his career goals would be better served by giving up his business and going to work for someone else. John called me a few weeks ago because the resume that he worked on for weeks with the placement office at his university had gotten him zero responses. He asked if I could help him. One look at his resume was enough. I knew exactly why no one was calling. It was for the same reasons you may be having no luck with your resume.

In my work in Human Resources for many years and certainly since launching my coaching practice almost fourteen years ago, I've looked at maybe a trillion resumes. Well, that's probably an exaggeration but it certainly feels like that many. When I used to be on the recruiting side of the process, piles of resumes were stacked up all over my desk representing the various jobs I was looking to fill. The resumes that got my attention were the ones that made it easy to put them in the right pile. Yes, it's as simple as that. Keep in mind that recruiters look at thousands of resumes each year. Your job in building your resume is to make it easy for that recruiter to pick you.

Making it easy to pick you starts at the top of the page. What job are you going for or what are you qualified to do? John's resume did not jump off the page because it just looked like a collection of too many words but nothing I could instantly zoom in on to get what John does or wants to do. A bold headline changed all that. For example, in John's case, Marketing / (slash) Brand Manager. Now I know that John is a candidate for that Marketing Manager job I'm recruiting for. Good. I know which pile to put his resume in. Actually, I'm so impressed with the bold headline that I take a minute to look further. Oh no! The headline is the only good news. The rest of the resume is just one big job description. That's not what I am looking for. There's only one reason I may be interested in John and that is what John can do for me, or the company I'm recruiting for. He hasn't told me a thing about that. It is just line after line of "It's all about John." What I want to know is what John *accomplished*. What results did he produce? The past is prologue. What he did for someone else, he is likely to do for me.

The next step in John's resume makeover is turning his litany of job duties into a sharply focused bullet list of accomplishments. OK. Now I think John might be my guy, at least one of the people I could talk to about my marketing job. But wait. I never heard of these companies he's worked for. I especially never heard of his own small business.

How do I know he can fit into my very specialized industry, large or small company? Calibrating me about the businesses he's worked for or founded is simple. John just needs to give me a sentence or two about each. For example, one past employer's business could be quickly summed up with this: *\$100M specialty hardware manufacturer providing parts to major component, electronics and furniture manufacturers around the world. Key customers included...* and then he listed a few very impressive customers that I now know are the type and size of businesses we market to. John is definitely moving up on my list of possibles.

Darn it, again. I thought John might be my guy but for some reason, he has made his education the focal point of the first page. I don't care about where he went to school. I especially don't care that he is working on an MBA. I do care, however, about what that program is preparing him to do for me. That's why we moved his education to the second page after his last job and changed the focus to the program he is taking and a special project he is part of that involves a complex new product launch with a venture capital component.

Hmmmm. John's looking better and better. But what kind of guy is he? Memberships and affiliations didn't tell me much until he revealed to his own great surprise that the organizations he founded and the boards he serves on were relevant. Duh! A few quick strokes of the keyboard and now John is a three-dimensional real human being with talents and experience that could be just what I'm looking for but I won't know until I talk to him. And there in is the myth of the resume. I see people struggle to make the perfect document, agonizing over every word and losing sight of the goal. The purpose of your resume is simply to get an interview. Period. It is not your autobiography. It is also not a test of your memory going back to your first lemonade stand in kindergarten. You just want to tell me what I need to know to email or call you to learn more about what you have presented. It is also not a fishing net, thrown out in the hopes that some unknown species of fish will swim into it and contact you. I call that the "Myth of Opportunity", that being definitive about what you want could limit you. The truth is if you don't ask for what you want, your chances are slim to none for getting it. Opportunity comes through other people, so you have to help them to help you. Doors can fly open when you learn *how* to ask for what you want.

One final thought on resumes. Forget about crafting the perfect resume and instead, put your attention on the wants and needs of your buyer. Make it easy for that individual to choose you for further conversation by creating a document that gets to what is most important quickly and easily. Now you may be wondering where the lecture is about layout, spelling and grammar. "But Mariette, what about the color of the paper? What do you think about lavender? Shouldn't I do something more dramatic to stand out?" Scary answer. NO. *Legally Blonde's* Elle Woods' scented resume may have given it a "little something extra" but that's the movies. Fahgetaboutit! Oh, and one more thing, when you are emailing your resume or uploading it, please, please, please do not call your document "resume v. 22 or My Resume.doc. Your name is the document name. For example, John Jones Resume.doc. Again, make it easy for your buyer to contact you.

Knowledge is power! The more you focus on what's most important, the quicker you will finally finish that resume!

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