

Resume & Cover Letter Writing/Updating, Job Hunting & Interviewing Tips

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The Job Market of Today Has Changed

As job seekers, we need to target the right companies and increase our potential to compete for fewer jobs in a down economy. It takes different tactics to rise above the “stack” of online applications and attract the Hiring Manager or Recruiter to what we have to offer.

The “shotgun” approach to applying for jobs (one cover letter or resume fits all job postings and companies) now only works for obtaining unemployment benefits.

If you were affected by a job loss:

It is a difficult transition from what was known, to what is now *unknown*. Give yourself an appropriate amount of time to grieve, reflect, and process the shock and loss and its effects. Experiencing this temporary process fully will enable you to move into a new process of evaluating your wants, needs, desires and next steps to obtain them.

Hopefully you will discover that this sudden change was probably the best thing that happened to you in terms of reassessing your career. Once you are psychologically ready to explore options, you will find a wealth of information at your fingertips.

“Only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” - Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1st Inaugural Address

This is not the time to give in to panic or feelings of victimization that will keep you trapped and unable to *move forward*. As fears of financial pressures may weigh on you, try and put things into perspective. Ask yourself “is this a life or death situation?” Answer– *No, it is not a life or death situation*. You can make the necessary changes to cope, survive and thrive. You are not alone, and help is all around you. Just seek and ask.

As human beings we all experience a certain amount of suffering, and hopefully we come out the other side of the suffering with a renewed spirit; stronger, wiser and positively changed. You can think of this circumstance as an opportunity to *increase your happiness and quality of life*.

Remember that you actually have everything inside yourself to cope and succeed. You just need to train your mind to believe it. Now is the chance to really determine what you want to do for a career that really makes you happy and fulfilled. Or, hone in on the company or job title in the same industry with your increased wisdom of your task enjoyment and strengths. Make this an exciting phase full of promise and possibilities!

Preparing for the job search:

If you don’t like researching on the internet, figure out a way to make it like a treasure hunt and pretend to be a bulldog with a bone, or a detective piecing puzzle pieces together. One piece of found information leads to another and another.

Do your research in all areas of life; family, friends, books, stores, music, parks, out & about, place of religious worship, networking, online, etc. Keep an open mind to all possibilities. Amazing things can cross your path if you put your desires out there.

Think innovatively yet practically, and you can tool your cover letters and resume versions to get noticed and work for the ad agency or organization you want to work for. Apply all the marketing principals you know to market you now.

Stay positive throughout all obstacles and challenges. Do not allow situations or other's negativity to affect you. Things are only impossible if you believe them to be. Change your mind and retrain your mind to think positively. Avoid being too cynical or proud to ask for help.

Think out of the box. Don't only consider fixed income jobs; be open to innovative ideas to obtain the income you need, either temporarily or long term. Perhaps the motivation for any individual comes from enjoying hobbies, part-time jobs, or long held dreams.

Now is the opportunity to figure out if you're ready for a complete career change or not. There are resource links provided in this document as well as the other PDF "Job Seeker Articles 2009." Do some deep soul searching and make hard decisions regarding the work that is leaving you tired and bored. *You know there is so much more you can offer and you would like to do so!*

Be flexible in your approach to ride out an economic downturn until you bring your dream job to you through a personalized approach to your efforts, visualization, appreciation, and helping others.

Think abundance, not lack. Be secure that everything will turn out fine in the end. Again, sometimes it helps to put life situations into perspective by asking "is this a life or death situation?" If not, you can *relax*, take your time and plot out your plan.

Need money to tie you over while you plan? Sell stuff not intrinsically important. Downsize and uncomplicated your life. Consider taking time to purge and organize your house; create a home office / home base for your job hunting operation. Remember, this is an opportunity for new beginnings; think differently and take new approaches to *everything* you never considered before. Even re-invent yourself!

Social Networking is key. Use LinkedIn.com, Facebook, and Twitter, among the various social networking sites out there to search out agencies, companies, and follow or connect to recruiting or other professionals at companies you want to work for to learn more. Don't know how to use Twitter or other social networking sites to hunt for jobs? <http://mashable.com/2009/03/13/twitter-jobs/>

Check out **Secrets of the Job Hunt Network**, "where career advice pros and job seekers connect" at <http://www.secretsofthejobhunt.com/>.

Also <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/customers/jsemp/jsemp.html> has networking resources now due to obtaining a government grant.

Screen your profiles:

Ensure there is nothing in your Facebook or other profile that would make an employer to decide against you for a position, as it shows how you are going to represent yourself and the company to a client. We subscribe to a service that notifies us any time our name is mentioned. Many employers search every person who sent a resume to them before ever calling them for even a phone interview. Be sure and set security preferences on social, not professional, sites like your Facebook profile in case some "friends" put inappropriate info or photos on your site. The others, like LinkedIn and Twitter, you could and should use for professional.

Are You On-line Search-able?

Make sure your personal email address contains YOUR NAME so you will be easily identified, as more and more Recruiters and Hiring Managers search out people online. Remember, you're marketing yourself.

If appropriate to what you want to do, create inexpensive personal business cards. A soon-to-be college graduate converted a "Hello my name is _____" sticker into a real business card; both creative and humorous. Work hard to keep your sense of humor through all the stresses of job hunting.

See <http://www.monster.com> for great articles for job seekers, optimize your resume's ability for keyword searches <http://www.squawkfox.com/2009/04/02/8-keywords-that-set-your-resume-on-fire/>

Make sure your resume / portfolio is posted online in as many places as it can be and keep it updated.

What's your story?

Always use the approach of marketing yourself to a potential employer with *specifically* what you can bring to their business that would appeal to their particular needs. This is why research is so important. There is so much free information out there at your disposal.

In your resume, identify your unique blend of skills, accomplishments and personality traits. See this link for examples: <http://blueskyresumes.com/blog/resume-value-propositions/>

Always do research on employers YOU want to work for and make a list of why. These might help you get started:

- Their Clients
- Their Work
- Their Philosophies
- Their Culture
- Their Approach to Business
- Their Location
- Their Benefits offered
- Their employee development and training programs
- Their opportunities for growth

Once you have your sights set on a particular company, show initiative and make creative efforts to get in the door, without coming across as "over the top." Examples include but are not limited to:

- Research the people who work on a particular account at a company you want to work for and seek them out at an event (like a local TweetUp or Local Industry Organizational Happy Hours like Ad Leagues) to introduce yourself and network
- Follow them on Twitter and LinkedIn to gain insight, great articles that will help you in interviewing and job hunting; and then introduce yourself, or create a dossier on their clients to show them how much you want the job and get it to the recruiter or hiring manager.

- You want to show your intelligence, initiative, drive, personality and insight on what you can bring to *them*.
- Develop your personal 30 or 60 second Elevator Speech. Here are some resources to help you: http://www.dalekurow.com/articles/elevator_speech and <http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/keranews/newsmain/article/0/6674/1559001/Economy/Economy.Project.The.30-Second.Elevator.Pitch>

Customized Cover Letters / Resumes Checklist:

Keep both customized cover letters brief and bulleted - less is more - yet specifics attract the eye. Customize to each company and job you're really interested in.

Avoid paragraph blocks in either cover letters or resumes. Hiring Managers and Recruiters reviewing hundreds of resumes only have a few seconds to spend reading your information to determine if you're a fit for their position. Some read cover letters and decide if they want to review resume, some avoid letters and just go to the resume. Think in terms of ad headlines- you want to catch the eye of your target audience to stop and look further in.

- Above all, make sure your cover letters and resume versions show potential employers how you will add value to their organization. Indicate what you have to offer and what your target employers would care about. This means you need to do more research on them and maybe even yourself!
- Determine what past early jobs to list appropriate to the job you're applying for and try to keep your resume to one or two pages; preferably one.
- Be sure to list company, dept., clients, roles, responsibilities, tasks and dates for each title or position.
- Include industry terminology, jargon or actual work task descriptions to show you know what you're talking about and what tasks you actually performed in that industry/position. A Hiring Manager wants to see and understand the context of what you actually did, so be specific, yet word it simply and professionally.
- If you have holes, determine a truthful angle and whether or not to list what you were doing/why you were unemployed during the hole or prepare to answer it in an interview.
- List any special proprietary software or software platforms you worked with (*Examples: Microsoft Office, Microsoft Access, PeopleSoft XYZ, Citrix based XYZ, Advantage Timesheets, etc.*) that might interest a potential employer because they wouldn't have to train you on that platform or application, or they would think you'd ramp up quickly, so you go to the top of the list of applicants in review. Also list your level of proficiency in each like *Beginner, Intermediate or Expert*.
- List Social Media Marketing experience; list all sites you're on to show the potential employer you're network and online savvy.

Customized Cover Letters might include...

- Who you know, a connection, the social network or who/where you learned of the company's existence.
- Quotes from or links to your LinkedIn profile, showing professional or other type recommendations from individuals, potential employer's, employees or management that you know, etc.
- Work you did at a company or have relatable experience to the position you're applying for

- Refer back to the job ad or qualifications you read or were told that are needed for this position and list in context of what you can bring with your experience or qualifications. *Keywords, keywords, keywords!*
- Incorporate the list of things that attract you to a company to tell a potential employer specifically why you want to work for them.
- Sincere flattery wins! Include compliments to the company on the work they do, or anything you admire that is specific to them, to show a Hiring Manager you did your research and did not do the “shotgun” application method
- Compliment them on their latest spot you saw on TV, heard on the radio or the latest promotional website, latest news or awards they received that impressed you and what about it makes you want to work for them
- Always refer to any articles where their name was mentioned. Google and other browser searching on companies can lead you to information. You learn more about the company and the company learns that you know how to research. A win/win.
- Include industry terminology, jargon or actual work task descriptions to show you know what you’re talking about and what tasks you actually performed in that industry. A Hiring Manager wants to see and understand the context of what you actually did, so be specific, yet word it simply and professionally.
- Read through job descriptions on the ad so you can include bullets from it that list your qualifications.
- List things like %’s of increased profits, efficiencies in processes &/or procedures, specific successes that a Hiring Manager would consider something valuable you would bring to the table.

Things to avoid writing on the Resume:

- Objective: “To work as a _____ in a _____ or _____.” Or “To obtain an entry level position in advertising.” Instead, try something more like “to work in the field of _____, bringing my skills in _____ and experience in _____ to contribute to a company achieving its business goals.”
- [Summary of] Skills or Objectives. Get to the point and only highlight the top things that are going to be relevant and grab the Hiring Manager’s attention, or don’t bother listing. If your resume experience is brief and shallow, it will be a quick read anyway. This can be viewed as a fluff statement that has no real meaning if not done appropriately.
- Resumes over 2 pages with too much detail and/or paragraphs. Think in bullet points. Less is more, but make sure you give enough detail for a hiring manager to get a context of your job roles & responsibilities. Consider only going into detail on the most relevant jobs to the position you’re targeting if you’ve got many years of experience to list, so you can keep the length of your resume down.
- Fluffy statements (even written very professionally) that don’t give a context of what you did or that you know what you’re talking about versus specific, layman descriptions that do. Of course researching the formal or informal nature of the company targeted is vital here. You want the Hiring Manager to get a basic context of the tasks, roles and responsibilities you performed in your job experience no matter what the industry; in case you’re exploring beyond advertising or marketing.
- Saying you “navigate the intranet.” Who doesn’t? A Hiring Manager wants to know specifics and what purpose (like actual navigation study or survey, for example). Be specific and make it relevant to a potential employer. Again, digital, interactive & social network marketing is where it’s at, so show your savvy in technology and research abilities.

More Advice & Tips:

Improve yourself:

Read industry or self improvement books like Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, and learn to research and understand the other person or company better than they know themselves. Look at aspects from their perspective versus just your own. If you're entry level, you have a lot to learn and may not even know the right questions to ask yet. **Never turn down knowledge or the opportunity for knowledge.**

Personality:

You may be member of or a combination of the following types of personalities: A leader, entrepreneur, technician, administrator, networker, etc. that lends better to some positions and fields than to others. Boiled down there are the sales and the support types too. You know how you're best managed, tasks you like to do and don't like about the jobs you've had. Use this knowledge of yourself to ask the questions of potential employers that will help you determine if the job is the right fit for YOU or not.

You may be neck and neck with another candidate for a job and not get it because you don't have chemistry with the hiring manager or supervisor, or any number of reasons you will probably never know the answer to. That's not something you can control, so assess how you can improve your own qualities and techniques and don't sweat it; move on to the next opportunity.

Realize there's a good fit out there for you. Always learn from each experience, avoid blaming others. Hold yourself accountable but don't beat yourself up. Be flexible and think differently on the next opportunity. Do your best and put out positivity, look ahead and you will go far. Work through any issues with past employers on your own. Talking negatively about past employers is a sure fire way not to get hired.

The smell of desperation:

Try not to take a job because you're desperate for income. Job satisfaction is paramount to a balanced life. Turnover costs too much for employers; for example, they don't like taking overqualified people for an entry or lower level position who might be out the door as soon as a better opportunity comes along, or constantly asking for more responsibility, title changes and especially salary increases that aren't there to give. You might say "but I don't want more responsibility, I've changed my life goals or have something else on the side." Well, you'll have to work hard to convince them of that. Figure out the pros and cons of a job and which are most important. No job is ever perfect or we wouldn't learn or grow much.

Research salary ranges:

For the jobs you are qualified for in the market you are applying in so you are realistic. You risk being screened out if you put too high a salary in your profile. You can put what you would like to make if in the realistic range, but be prepared to negotiate down \$2,000 - \$5,000 at least, especially in a "buyers' market." <http://rileyguide.com/careers/index.shtml>

Figure out other negotiating items to bring up in lieu of dollars. Ask for what you want as long as it would be considered reasonable for a business in the current market situation. The worst that can happen is you get a “no” answer. But keep in mind if you’re considered too demanding, that can have an adverse affect on your being offered the job.

Monster and other online job applications tips:

Answer any questionnaires tied to online job postings *completely*. They are there to screen out applicants the hiring manager doesn’t have time to review as a priority. Yes, that is the harsh reality. At many companies, HR recruiters have been downsized, so busy professionals have to manage applicants for their team’s open positions on their own time, on top of their heavy work load. That means hundreds of applications; thus, the reason for the screening questionnaire.

It’s time consuming for you to apply to jobs online, and, for example; if you misread the answer choices and forget to click on all the software listed to tell your level of experience of them, it may result in you not obtaining the minimum points to be in the “screened-in” job seekers. Your information will still be available to the hiring manager, but they won’t necessarily even review your information if they find who they’re looking for in the screened-in job seekers.

If you make it past a screening questionnaire, you hope for a phone interview next. If you make it past the phone interview you might have a one-on-one interview or even a group interview depending on the number of applicants.

Presence:

Evaluate and overhaul, if necessary, your demeanor and how you come across in your communication style. Your voice needs to have a bright, positive sound to it both over the phone and in person. Remember to relax and smile when appropriate. You want to come across as respectful, intelligent, easy to communicate with, have a can-do attitude and be excited about the opportunity to work for a company, or you might cost yourself an opportunity. Get some coaching from your friends, family and anyone who could pose as a potential employer and practice role play interviewing with help from internet articles on interviewing successfully. Take initiative. *Always always always* follow up when you send resumes to specific people to show them you are very interested and don’t leave it up to the original contacts you had forward your resume to do your follow-up for you.

Dress for success. Research the company / department and be sure to *always* appear professional, crisp and clean, even with your own personal style. They want to know you’re serious about wanting the job and know what’s appropriate to wear in a business environment; i.e., ability to dress up in front of clients/management even if you’re not expecting to ever be in front of those individuals. You can relax on the dress code as appropriate once you’re hired.

Generational differences & your attitude:

To be successful and happy in your work, you must develop a positive mental outlook, self-reliance, sense of accountability, ability to overcome obstacles, possess a can-do attitude, problem solving approach and commitment when the going gets tough.

Think about those times in your life when those descriptions defined you and be ready to incorporate them into your cover letters, resumes, interviews, and on the job.

It's very important to listen to and learn from your supervisors when you begin a new position. Of course you have a lot to offer and contribute, but get the lay of the land and respect the experience of your supervisors before you impose your expectations to jump in, manage and lead all on your own.

Your supervisor may have expectations that you prove you're ready to be given more responsibility without oversight before they do so. They may have a different work style and expectations than you do.

Practice patience, compassion, maturity and respect by asking for a meeting with a supervisor you are having issue with and respectfully state your case and listen to what they have to say. When necessary, check your ego at the door to work toward reaching a mutual win/win solution.

Insurance & Benefits:

Check out what potential employers offer. Educate yourself. Cobra insurance may be too expensive and you may have time before paying. Read the fine print of all legal documents sent to you. Check out other carriers to see if you can afford even minimal health insurance to get by until you can get them through an employer.

When COBRA notices and legal papers come, including the **Certificate of Insurance**, SAVE it and provide it when you obtain new insurance. This can help you avoid "pre-existing conditions," or not being covered by your new employer's insurance.

Some Helpful Job Hunting Site Resources: *(Also refer to Job Seeker Articles 2009 Excel Document)*

More articles and sites on how to create resumes and job hunt for the best job for you:

<http://career-advice.monster.com/>

Social networking and resources/tools/discussion board:

<http://www.secretsofthejobhunt.com/forum>

Three ways to sabotage your job search:

<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/job-says-hughes-2329734-applicants-company>

Interview Advice:

[Another dirty little secret of job interviews](#)

<http://economy.freedomblogging.com/2009/03/31/another-dirty-little-secret-of-job-interviews/>

<http://www.examiner.com/examiner/x-8559-Job-Search-Examiner~y2009m4d21-Preparing-for-a-successful-phone-interview>