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Basic Resume Tips, Organization and Writing Techniques | With Examples

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The Importance of High Quality Cover Letters and Resumes

How strong is your career first impression? You have likely been told that first impressions are everything. This statement is not only applicable in virtually every life setting, but is crucial when you are applying for a career position.

When you are preparing to enter the job force, to enter into a new career or simply applying for a new job, your cover letter and resume are your first impression. Simply put, together a resume and cover letter may be the only pieces of information that a potential employer has to consider you for an interview. An interviewer often receives a large quantity of cover letters, resumes and job applications for every position that they are recruiting for. If your first impression is not strong, it may cost you an interview opportunity and ultimately the position you were interested in.

Your cover letter is a summary, quick glance overview of you as a candidate and why you are interested in the opportunity that you are either inquiring about or the position that you are applying for. Cover letters can be submitted via email, fax or handed to an interviewer in person. The cover letter is typically also accompanied by a copy of your resume.

Your resume is a detailed accounting of your professional experiences, providing a summary of where you have been educated, where you have been employed, the roles and responsibilities that you have had at each of your position, your awards and honors and your community involvement activities.

The combination of your cover letter and the resume is your opportunity to make a strong first impression.

Power Words and Phrases to Use

When writing your resume and cover letter, the words that you choose matter. When possible, you will want to use action words. Action words and power words improve the image portrayed in the eyes of the individual reading your documents.

Here are some sample words to use when writing your cover letter or resume:

- Adapt
- Administer
- Change
- Assist
- Communicate
- Compile
- Contribute
- Decide
- Demonstrate
- Delegate
- Encourage
- Foster
- Increase
- Integrate
- Manage
- Organize

In addition to power words, you also want to choose phrases that suggest power, authority and the ability to produce positive results and outcomes. Some commonly used power phrases are:

- Results driven
- Top ranked
- Solutions oriented
- Organized

It is also important to point out accomplishments that you have achieved and awards that you have won within your past positions. When possible, point out those accomplishments that are most applicable to the position that you are applying for. While all of them show value, the interviewers are going to want to review those in particular that most closely align with the results that will be expected from you in the role you are being considered for.

Some phrases to consider using include:

- Increased department revenues by X%
- Increased sales over the prior year by X%
- Reduced overhead or expenditures by X%
- Ranked #X out of #X people in the company/department/nation/region
- Exceeded targets by X%
- Exceeded goals by X%
- Improved productivity of the team X% over the prior quarter/year
- Exceeded expectations

Writing Your Cover Letter

A cover letter should accompany your resume when you are applying for or inquiring about a career position. The primary purpose of the cover letter is to describe your intent or interest in the available or posted position and to demonstrate in a condensed format your qualifications for the particular position.

When interviewers are scanning resumes that were submitted, they often scan the cover letters first. Or, in some cases they only scan the cover letters. So, it is crucial that your cover letter demonstrates your qualifications and you overall in the best possible light so that you are considered further for an interview opportunity.

Cover Letter Structure

When creating a cover letter, there are several basic points or areas that should be covered.

- Personal Information/Employer Information- This section includes names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for reference
- Today's Date
- Salutation to the reader of the cover letter- i.e. Dear Sir/Madam
- Opening Paragraph- This section describes your overall intent and interest in the position you are applying for. This is the first opportunity that you have as a job candidate to sell yourself to the reader or potential interviewer.
- Body of the Cover Letter- This section of the cover letter describes in concise detail how you are a match for the specific position and cites specific and relevant examples from your career background and resume.
- Closing Remarks- These short sentences thank the reader for their time, describe your intent for follow up and offer an invitation for the reader to follow up with you directly.

- Your Signature

Cover Letter Tips

- Include your current contact information- phone numbers and emails
- Address the letter to a specific person if known
- Customize each cover letter to the job being applied for
- Keep the length to a single page
- Don't use form letters- write a personalized letter
- Use concise language- don't be too wordy
- Stick to paragraphs that are 3-5 sentences in length as opposed to long paragraphs as they will be easier to read
- Send one with each resume that you send out
- Sign each one when you are mailing or faxing them to personalize them
- Use specific career examples to demonstrate that you are a strong fit for the position; don't just say that you are

Cover Letter Samples

Your Name

Your City, State, Zip Code
Your Phone Number
Your Email

Date

Name
Title
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

I am interested in the (Name Position) position advertised on (date). My resume is enclosed for your review. Given my related experience and excellent capabilities I would appreciate your consideration for this (opportunity/job opening). I believe that my skills are an ideal match for this position.

Your Requirements:

- (Create a list of the job requirements that were listed in the posting. It is not necessary to list them all, but it is beneficial to list the requirements that most closely match your professional qualifications.)

My Qualifications:

- (List the qualifications specifically that you have that meet the criteria that the company listed in their career description or project posting.)

I appreciate your taking the time to review my credentials and experience. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Your Signature

Your Typed Name

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip Code

Your Phone Number

Your Email Address

Date

Employer Contact Information-

Name

Title

Company

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

First Paragraph:

This opening paragraph describes the purpose for your follow up and the position in which you are inquiring about or applying for. If you were referred or have a mutual acquaintance or contact, be sure to mention that here.

Middle Paragraphs:

This section of the cover letter is your opportunity to describe the benefits that you personally bring to the employer and to the opportunity. It is crucial that you make a strong connection here between what they are looking for and what you bring to the table. When possible, support your statements with relevant examples of experience from your resume as it will strengthen your position.

Final Paragraph:

This paragraph is where you have the opportunity to thank the reader for considering you for the position or opportunity. Include a statement as to your intent to follow up if you do not hear from the reader. Also, invite them to contact you directly.

(Respectfully yours/Sincerely),

An Introduction to Resumes

How do you represent yourself on a sheet of paper? With a competitive job market, it is more important than ever for this representation to be strong so that you position yourself in the best possible light to gain interviews and employment. This task is so important actually that there are a variety of companies that specialize solely in assisting job candidates in the creation of their winning resume.

When creating your resume, there are several things that should be taken into consideration, including:

1. **Length**- While the traditional rule of thumb suggests that resumes should not be longer than a page, for professionals with extensive career backgrounds, this can present a challenge. The important thing when creating your resume is to provide concise information about your education, employment background and other relevant experience for the position in which you are inquiring about.
2. **Copy**- The written content of your resume needs to be tightly written and not overly wordy. Interviewers have little time and will often become less interested in a resume that is lengthy without providing specific details about the candidate.
3. **Importance**- Highlight your most impressive and most relevant facts first. There are a variety of formats that can be utilized for resumes. If your education is not your strongest asset, do not lead with this information. Lead with your strength as this is what will be seen and read first by the interviewer.

4. **Paper**- Print your resume on the highest quality, plain white or vanilla colored paper that you can afford.

The Basic Resume Format

While there are a variety of resume formats that can be used, the basic information that is included in a resume is fairly consistent. Each resume should include candidate contact information, education, employment history, licenses or professional designations and community involvement.

These are the basic sections to a resume:

Contact Information- Include your full name, address, phone number and email address

Education- Include degrees, certifications held, professional licenses and designations held

Employment- Your employment history should be listed from the most recent or present. Be specific about challenges you faced and overcome, job duties and successes within each of the relevant experiences. Elaborate with more information on the roles that have the most relevance to the current role that you are applying for.

Community Involvement- Professional organizations, networking organizations, board positions, community positions and leadership positions and volunteer work should be listed in this section, starting with the most recent.

Job Skills- Specific computer, technology, trade skills should be listed here

Resume Writing Tips

1. Proofread! Read over your resume yourself and have another person read over it a second time. Nothing is worse than submitting a resume that has grammatical errors or spelling errors. Remember, this is your first impression!
2. Customize your resume when possible for the specific role that you are applying for and highlight the relevant experience that you have had.
3. If you are not getting the type of response from your resume that you were hoping for, consider editing it or hiring a professional to help. The rewards for getting your resume right are immense.
4. Constantly update your resume, even when you are not searching for a job. By doing so, it will make your resume more accurate and you will be sure to include important accolades, achievements and milestones that can be challenging to remember when you are sitting down to write a resume several years after the events occurred.

Sample Resumes

Simple Chronological Resume

Name

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Experience

(Most Recent Employer)

April 2006- Present

- Opened new specialty boutique
- Placed orders to restock merchandise and handled receiving of products
- Managed payroll, scheduling, reports, email, inventory, and maintained clientele book and records
- Integrated new register functions
- Extensive work with visual standards and merchandising high-ticket items

Sales Associate, (Name the Retail Store)-(Name the Position)

July 2004-April 2006

- Merchandised designer women's wear
- Set-up trunk shows and attended clinics for new incoming fashion lines
- Worked with tailors and seamstresses for fittings
- Scheduled private shopping appointments with high-end customers

Education

B.S. University of Houston

Sample- Extensive Professional Experience

(Name)

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Current Core Competencies:

- Change management experience including employee communications and training
- Strong public speaking and presentation skills. Presented at major events such as retirement seminars, market outlook seminars, training events, conferences and classroom.
- Successful curriculum development and implementation for a sales force and within a University classroom
- Accountable to senior management for designing processes to achieve business goals for productivity, financial planning, recruiting, compliance, client acquisition and quality of advice. Ability to leverage team members to achieve desired targets.
- Ability to cross- sell products by leveraging corporate relationships while tracking results to meet and exceed sales targets
- Experienced in creating lead generation tools for a sales force, through the development of seminar initiatives, trade show participation, establishment of center of influence groups and utilization of their network and natural market
- Ability to create and foster a high employee retention environment in a low retention industry
- Ability to make quick and difficult decisions under pressure
- Ability to lead community projects and fundraising initiatives by partnering with community leaders and organization members
- Ability to design and execute recruiting and selection processes, through leveraging team relationships, forming corporate recruiting relationships with professionals, Universities and oncampus recruiting, job fair participation, internet recruiting and competitive recruiting
- Knowledge of financial markets, economic trends, financial planning and customer life cycles
- Ability to plan, coordinate, and execute planning for corporate conferences, community events, large scale marketing events and sponsorships through effective teamwork
- Ability to leverage business reporting and tracking to identify business opportunities and bottlenecks within an organization to lead change with a team or an individual producer
- Ability to manage all functions of a business from budgeting to operations

Education

- B.S. Industrial Organizational Psychology/ Minor- Sociology & Business; University of Houston
- Professional Licenses/NASD:** Texas Life and Health, Series 7, Series 63, Series 24, Series 51 Asset Allocation Specialty

Professional Experience:

McCraw's Confections 07/06-10/07

President and Chairman of the Board

- Successfully coordinated 4 candy and confections brands in the US and Canadian marketplaces
- Managed our team of 138 internal and external salespeople; Increased sales 38% over the prior year
- Decreased company expenditures and increased efficiency
- Launched new technology standards and procedures that decreased expenditures and increased our customer service standards
- Supervised the internal operations team and initiatives- Human resources, Production schedules, staffing, production planning, procurement of all suppliers, management of accounts payable and receivable
- Coordinated and managed national and international product distribution
- Presented product initiatives to Fortune 500 retail buyers
- Successfully coordinated new branding efforts and 4 product launches in 2007

Ameriprise Financial & American Express Financial Advisors

Field Vice President- Employee Channel 05/05 to 07/06

- Oversee all Baltimore Employee Financial Advisors and New Hires in Licensing/Training Phases
- Manage and lead a team of 12 manager and manager/coaches, as well as entire administrative team
- Exceed National 1st Year and Total retention targets

□ 2005-Leader's Summit Qualifier (#4 Team of 32 Nationally- Top 5 Qualify)

Lateral Roles:

- Co-Lead client acquisition initiatives- hosted regional training calls to increase high value client growth within the DC/Baltimore region- 2006 results: 60% growth within Baltimore site over prior year period
- Co-lead the Women in Leadership Initiative within the DC/Baltimore Region, 2005, 2006 (2005-largest attendance since inception) and hosted regional calls aimed at improving retention among women as well as to encourage a higher percentage of women who enter into leadership roles
- National mentoring relationships with managers to enhance role development
- Top 10 Finalist for the Best Places to Work in Baltimore-2006, *Baltimore Business Journal*

American Express Financial Advisors

Market Group Client Acquisition Consultant/ Financial Advisor 05/04 to 05/05

Independent Channel

- Managed client assets in a team- \$210 million dollars
- Successfully managed an American Express Financial Advisors Franchise and participated in the business transition sale of all assets and clients
- Individual financial planning work with clients covering 6 key areas of financial planning
- Provided all marketing support and deliverables to Top Platinum Team Advisors

Client Acquisition Consultant:

- 41 P2(Independent Channel) advisors in Houston, TX
- Worked in the field to drive veteran advisor practices one on one
- Partnered with the leadership team to execute and develop training strategies for the veteran advisor to increase overall productivity within their practices
- 1st Quarter results: 22% TOS growth over prior year period; 2nd Quarter results: 13% TOS growth over prior year period; 3rd Quarter results: 28% TOS growth over prior year period
- National Speaker for High Value Client Acquisition in P2

University of Houston 2004-2005

Adjunct Professor- Introduction to Selling 101, Program for Excellence In Selling

- *Contributed an opening chapter vignette to Selling A.S.A.P., published in the Spring 2004 textbook on Sales Agility*
- Developed curriculum and provided mentoring to students to aid in achieving the Sales Certificate from the program

American Express Financial Advisors

Field Vice President-Houston, TX-Employee Channel 04/2002 to 05/2004

- 21 Financial Advisors and 15 in Licensing Phase
- Leadership team of 5 and the entire administrative team
- Production increase of 95% and client acquisition increase of 61% over 2002
- #2 in the Market Group for 2003 referral promotion
- Circle of Success Leadership Qualifier in 2003 for G2 performance 2004
- **Ranked #4 of 130+ offices in the country- G1 performance 2nd Quarter 2004 (G1=Highest Performance Ranking of 4 possible)**

American Express Financial Advisors

District Manager 04/2001 to 04/2002

- Led 14 Financial Advisors and actively recruited new financial advisors
- #1 Ranked District Manager in the MG for 2001 and 1st Quarter of 2002
- 2001 Leader's Summit Qualifier (#1 Team of 32 nationally) & Circle of Success Winner

American Express Financial Advisors

Advisor Coach/ Financial Advisor 08/1999 to 04/2001

- 1st Year Top Achiever Award Recipient- (Award based on annual production)
- Career Development Conference Qualifier- (Top 100 First Year Advisors)
- #1 Ranked Coach 2000/2001
- Mercury Award Recipient- (Award for First Year Performance)

Community Activities:

Currently Involved:

- Toronto Junior League
- Toronto Board of Trade- Young Professionals

- Alpha Chi Omega Alumnae- President
 - Board Member- Community Health Charities of Maryland, 2005-2007 Term
 - o Led the Annual Art Auction Fundraising Event in Ticket Sales i.e. 25% total volume
 - Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Annual Fundraising Contributor
- Past Involvement:
- Greater Dallas Chamber
 - Greater Baltimore Committee-Tourism and Education Subcommittees
 - Junior League of Dallas- Celebrate Style Fundraiser Subcommittee Chair 2005-2006
 - o Worked to lead the Key Annual Fundraising Gala and Home Tour Events!

Sample- Professional Seeking Advancement

Professional Summary

- Certified Project Management Professional (**PMP**), Certified **ITIL** Foundation v2 and v3.
- Experienced team leader, demonstrating planning and project implementation success across numerous client portfolios and over 15 projects within the past 2 years.
- Experience in requirements gathering, documentation, design, development and testing for a variety of technical projects.
- Experienced IT professional with over **8 years of experience**, giving me the skills necessary to lead high level planning and management implementation projects.
- Seasoned professional possessing business acumen and client relationship management experience.
- Professional implementation and planning experience across several business verticals; education, energy, security, identity management and healthcare.

Professional Experience

RealPage, Inc./M|PF Yield Star

Implementation Manager, Carrollton, TX
11/2007

02/05 to

Previous responsibilities included:

- Management of projects involving the initiation, planning, execution, and control of over 15 product implementation projects.
- Led a team of 6 technicians and 3 consultants to drive project success across multiple clients.
- Assisted in the initial creation of incident management and change control processes, while managing product support.
- The evaluation of client service requests for enhancements and evaluation of their impact to the products via internal change control and release management processes.
- Coordination of technical team activities with stakeholders to deliver final products to client and end-users.
- Management of internal product development for custom client initialization toolkits supporting client implementation.
- Coordination with development teams to enhance tools used to support the client initialization process.

- Provided **forecasting** to senior management to evaluate the financial performance of the division and affects on **P&L**.

Valtech

Senior Consultant, Houston TX
01/2005

05/04 to

Previous responsibilities included:

- Joint responsibility for the EventCenter Portal, allowing JPMC to schedule investor conferences within the United States.
- Implementation of enhancement requests within fixed release cycles according to **CMMI Level 2** requirements.

Cambridge Technology Partners

Senior Consultant, Dallas TX
04/2004

07/00 to

Previous responsibilities included:

- 4 years of experience implementing solutions using **JAVA/J2EE** technologies.
- Recognition for contributions to the business development centers of the Dallas Independent School District Student Portal pilot.
- Contributions to multiple business verticals including energy, education, security, identity management and healthcare.
- Contributions to the development and testing of a web UI for a Public Key Infrastructure (**PKI**) Certificate Management System.
- Facilitated **scope verification** with key stakeholders within the Federal Government.
- Led the implementation of portal systems within the Dallas Independent School District.
- Facilitated client information gathering sessions, creation of communication plans across departments, and the delivery of the implementation roll out plan.

*Was - Facilitated client information gathering sessions, communication facilitation across departments and the delivery of the implementation roll out plan - but I wasn't clear what the *communication facilitation across departments* was highlighting. May just need rewording)*

- Co-project chair for a business development project where we developed and integrated a custom portal software package.
- Contributed to functional analysis and implementation of a new online marketplace that enabled capacity auctions and subsequent power scheduling that resulted in the sale of over 4,900 megawatts of power generation capacity (Reliant Energy+TXU) in 2001 per the Texas Public Utilities Commission's (TPUC) requirement to sell at least 15 percent of capacity via public auctions.

- Contributed to scope definition and two phases of design for an energy trading dashboard for taking advantage of cross-market opportunities in energy markets.

Skills/Certifications

- Information Technology Infrastructure Library (**ITIL**) Foundations Versions 2 & 3 Certification
- PMI Project Management Professional Certification (**PMP**)
- **Agile** Software Development Methodology
- Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook

Education

BBA Management Information Systems; Texas A&M University
College Station, TX

Honors/Clubs; Delta Sigma Pi, Association of Information and Technical Professionals (AITP)

Closing Remarks

In any economy, presenting yourself in the best possible light for a career change, new employment or entry into the job force is important. Your resume and your cover letter may be your only opportunity to create a positive first impression. And, the first impression that you create could make the difference in whether you are invited by an employer for an interview.

So, take the time to create a well written, professional cover letter and resume for consideration when you apply or inquire about a position in the job force. And, you will be taking a proactive step towards increasing your opportunities for a job offer.