




Resume Secrets that Might Surprise You

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About the Speaker

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Ground Rules and Warnings

- These are just my opinions, observations I've made over years of recruiting
- What's true for one person may not be true for another (or what works in one situation may not work in another)
- So use what works, ignore what doesn't




Overview

- In this session we will cover
 - What is a resume?
 - Some cold, brutal truths about resumes and interviews
 - Proactive steps you can take to improve your resume and increase the number of interviews you receive



What is a Resume?

- A resume is a written statement of your educational and work experience, used esp. when you are trying to get a new job *(Cambridge)*
- A resume is an account of one's employment history and qualifications (often for presentation to a potential future employer when applying for a job) *(Wiktionary.com)*
- *Both definitions are wrong*



What is a Resume?

- A resume is *not* a summary of your skills and professional experience
- A resume is also not:
 - Your tombstone (Brian McCaleb)
 - A capabilities overview
 - Your life's story condensed into a few pages



What is a Resume?

- So if your resume is not a summary of what you have done, and not a summary of what you *can* do, then what is a resume?

A resume is a vehicle that shows whether or not you match what the reader is looking for.

- And that's *all* it is.



What is a Resume?

- That may be a controversial definition, but is it a *good* definition?
- How can you tell if a definition is good?
 - If you get *more* interviews as a result of using it, it is a good definition—keep it.
 - If you get *fewer* interviews as a result of using it, it's not a good definition—discard or change it.



What is a Resume?

- Consider this: There are only two situations where someone would be reading your resume:
 - You sent it to them (solicited or unsolicited)
 - They found it somewhere (in their resume database, on a job board, etc.)



What is a Resume?

- You may have sent your resume to someone in response to a particular job posting.
- You may have sent your resume to a company at which you'd like to work, with no particular job in mind at the time.
- You may have even posted your resume in hundreds of places in the hopes that someone would find you.



What is a Resume?

- However, why you *sent* your resume doesn't matter.
- What matters is why someone is *reading* it.
- Why would someone be reading your resume?
- To see whether or not you match what he/she is looking for!



What is a Resume?

- What the reader is looking for may be:
 - Industry experience
 - Tools and technology
 - Education or domain knowledge
 - Something else entirely
- You may not know what exactly they are looking for, but you *do* know that whoever is reading your resume is doing so to see if you have what they need.



What is a Resume?

Q: What's wrong with the following?

A resume is a short account of one's career and qualifications prepared typically by an applicant for a position (Webster)

A: Webster's definition doesn't focus on the fact that the reader is looking for something and is judging whether or not the applicant has it.



What is a Resume?

- But combine Webster's definition with my definition and you get:

A resume is a short account of one's career and qualifications prepared typically by an applicant for a position, that shows how the applicant matches what the reader is looking for.



What is a Resume?

- *That* is a workable definition!
- If you know a resume is a vehicle that shows whether or not you match what the reader is looking for, then you can take proactive steps to help the reader find what he/she is looking for, and thus increase the number of interviews you receive.



Resume Secret #1

- The most commonly held beliefs about resumes are incomplete and do not focus on what you can do to increase your chances at receiving an interview.
- Let's look at some more secrets that may surprise you.



Resume Secret #2

- No one will ever read your resume.
- People may scan it, read *parts* of it, search for keywords in it. But nobody is going to read your resume from beginning to end and weep at the sheer beauty and insight of your writing, your creative spelling and mastery of the English language.
- We just don't have the time.



Resume Secret #3

- You will never be hired because of your resume.
- You will be *rejected* based your resume, weeded out based on your resume, even mocked and scorned based on your resume.
- And if you *do* get an interview, it won't be because someone liked your resume—it'll be because you weren't rejected.



Resume Secret #4

- You are writing for Short Attention Span Theater (SAST) (Bonni Graham)
- This takes Resume Secret #2 to a whole new level: Not only will people not read your entire resume, they probably won't even read entire *paragraphs*. Or lists with more than three items. Or....



Resume Secret #4

- The longer your resume, the greater the chance that you'll be rejected.
- If you are going to err, err on the side of brevity. (Save the details for the interview.)
- Per Resume Secret 3, people will use your resume to reject you, so give them as little ammunition as possible!



Resume Secret #5

- You can have *everything* a company is looking for and still not get an interview.
- Why? Resume Secrets 2, 3 & 4
- Example: A company called us once who needed a technical writer in Houston with patent application writing experience.
- We found someone and submitted him...



Resume Secret #5 (continued)

- and the hiring manager promptly rejected the candidate saying, “He doesn’t have patent writing experience.” (???)
- The candidate *did* have patent writing experience, but it didn’t appear in his resume until the middle of a bulleted list half way down the second page.
- The manager just didn’t read that far.



Resume Secret #5 (continued)

- Exercise: What should that patent writer have done to get around Resume Secrets 2, 3 & 4 and avoid Resume Secret 5?
 - Put what the reader was looking for (patent writing experience) near the top of his resume
 - He had in his resume: “Summary: Experience writing user manuals, policies and procedures,…”
 - He *should* have had, “Summary: Experience writing patent applications, user manuals,…”



Resume Secret #6

- I don't care what your title was, I want to know what you *did*.
- Putting "Member of Technical Staff, XYZ Company" tells me absolutely nothing.
- Actually, it's worse than nothing as now I have to dive into the text just to find out what you did, I may get tired of *looking* for the info I need, and may just reject your resume in favor of someone who knows how to write for SAST.



Resume Secret #6 (continued)

- Remember, the sole purpose of a resume is to show how you match what a company is looking for.
- *The easier it is for the reader to find what he/she is looking for, the better your chances of getting an interview.*



Resume Secret #6 (continued)

- This especially applies to people whose job functions don't match their job titles or who have really non-standard titles. Examples:
 - You are project manager but your title is, "Project Support Specialist"
 - You are a technical writer but your title is, "User Assistance Engineer"



Resume Secret #6 (continued)

- This is also important for people trying to transition into a new career by leveraging their current experience. Examples:
 - You spend 90% of your time doing technical writing but your title is, “Sales Engineer”
 - Instead of showing your title in your resume:
XYZ Company, Sales Engineer (what you were called)
 - Show what you *did*:
XYZ Company, Technical Writer / Sales Engineer



Resume Secret #7

- The *smallest* typo or formatting error can scuttle your chances of getting an interview
- I used to say, “Engineers can get away with typos in their resumes, but technical writers cannot,” but I don’t believe that’s true anymore.
- An engineering manager once said about a programmer with typos in his resume, “If he can’t write two pages of error-free resume, how can I expect him to write 10,000 lines of error-free code?”



On the Positive Side

- Now that we've examined what *not* to do, let's summarize what *to* do:
 - Find out what the hiring manager is looking for (when possible) and make sure that information is easy to find in your resume
 - Be brief, but clear (write for SAST)
 - State what you *did*, not what you were called
 - Have ZERO DEFECTS in your resume



On the Positive Side

- Remember: Keep what works for you, discard or change what doesn't.
- The end result will be more interviews!



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