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HUMAN RESOURCES

5 Signs of a Boring Résumé

Résumés are fairly cut-and-dry documents. But coloring inside the lines too closely could result in a résumé that's a yawner.

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By *Stephanie Vozza, Fast Company (TNS)*

Résumés are fairly cut-and-dry documents. Following the traditional “template” helps you convey your background and essential skills in a way that’s easily grasped by a hiring manager. But coloring inside the lines too closely could result in a résumé that’s a yawner.

“I read résumés and cover letters daily and there are usually a couple handfuls of those that are unique and different and pull me in, making me want to interview this person,” says Cheryl Hyatt, co-founder of Hyatt-Fennell Executive Search. “It’s important to provide enough material for the reader to say, ‘I really like what I’m reading.’”

While what makes a résumé interesting may be subjective, here are five signs that your résumé is lackluster:

1. It’s missing numbers

A résumé usually regurgitates the responsibilities you had in your position, but it shouldn’t be just a bunch of words. A vice president, for example, would list that they oversee a team, but that’s boring, says Hyatt.

“What do you oversee? Who do you oversee? How many people do you oversee?” asks Hyatt. “You want to identify information within that résumé that has some data in it, as opposed to just strictly words.”

Numbers help underscore accomplishments and demonstrate that you understand your role and your job. For example, “I increased productivity in my department by X percent.” Or, “Retention on my team was at 98% while I was in charge.”

2. It’s too comprehensive

Keeping things simple is most important when it comes to writing a résumé, and that means weeding out information that isn’t relevant, says Janet Sheffer, associate director of employer engagement at Arcadia University in Philadelphia.

“In my previous role as a recruiter, something that would often turn me away from reviewing a résumé was if a candidate included irrelevant information about their work history,” she says. “To make their résumé stand out and feel enticing, a candidate must tailor their résumé to each job they’re applying for.”

Some skills may be transferable, but if it results in a résumé that’s more than two pages, it can feel heavy and hard to digest. Focus on the most important jobs and

duties, suggests Amy Marcum, manager of HR services for the HR provider Insperity.

“Listing work history from high school, college, or several decades prior can seem unfocused and lose a recruiter’s interest as they sort through irrelevant jobs,” she says. “Exclude roles from a résumé that do not illustrate relevant skills or success.”

In addition, don’t list every single task you performed. Instead, Marcum recommends keeping it to core areas where you achieved impressive results.

3. It duplicates your cover letter

Most hiring managers look at cover letters first, says Hyatt. “That cover letter should identify why you want the job and why you think you’re the right person,” she says. “Every organization has a mission. How do you fit into that mission? And what can you do for that company?”

A cover letter is also where you show your personality, adds Hyatt. “Show the reader how your skill sets are going to match up with what it is they’re looking for, and how you’re going to be a good fit for the culture of the organization,” she says.

Your cover letter should work in tandem with your résumé, which details your background and accomplishments. “You don’t want a cover letter that just reiterates what’s on your CV, and you don’t want a CV that’s so long and broad that you don’t have anything left to describe in your cover letter,” says Hyatt.

4. It’s passive

Your high school English teacher was right; writing in the active voice makes your sentences come alive. Vicki Salemi, career expert for the job site Monster.com, suggests being intentional about including action-oriented verbs attached to responsibilities. For example, “leading teams,” “driving engagement,” and “running operations.”

“Your executive summary is one area to focus on since the rest of your résumé will highlight your work experience, typically in bullets, as well as your cover letter, if you wanted to add some flair in terms of who you are and what you’re looking to do,” says Salemi. “Adjectives like ‘dynamic,’ ‘go-getter,’ ‘self-starter’ are some examples of vibrant words to use to make it be a little more engaging.”

5. It hasn’t received outside feedback

When you're too close to your own career, it's possible to overlook some of your best accomplishments or strengths. It's important to ask an objective person to review your résumé, especially if you're applying for a leadership position, says Hyatt.

“Don't ask your spouse or your parents or your son or daughter to read it,” she says. “They know you well enough and may not feel comfortable saying, ‘You're missing this piece.’ Have an objective reader, possibly a mentor, read through your materials and ask, ‘Am I missing anything? Is there something that shouldn't be in here? Something I did not cover? Is anything here not clear?’”

Also, having another person read your material can help you avoid misspellings and grammatical errors.

While it takes more time to create an engaging and targeted résumé, it can pay off in an increased number of interview requests. “Making sure it's specific to the job you're applying for shows that you care,” says Hyatt.

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