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Career Coach: Avoid Raising Résumé Red Flags

By Kristen Bahler May 9, 2016

What should candidates keep in mind to keep their résumés from being thrown in the “pass” pile?
Responses have been edited for clarity and concision.



Jeff Gilbreth

Jeff Gilbreth is a partner in the labor and employment group at Nixon Peabody, a Boston-based law firm that works with clients in asset management and other industries.

Don't forget to proofread. Hiring managers are inundated with résumés, and they're going to weed out candidates that make typos or other mistakes. A résumé that is error-free gets you a seat at the table.

Don't turn in a résumé that looks like everyone else's. The person looking at your résumé is going to make a quick decision about whether or not to move forward, so you need something that sets you apart from the pack. Maybe that's a skill you have, volunteer experience, or an award you won. You need to stand out in that person's mind, so put something on your résumé that distinguishes you from everyone else.

Don't ignore a gap in your résumé. Managers are going to scrutinize your résumé closely, so be ready to explain those gaps. Use your discretion — if you were gone for two years traveling, that should be on your résumé.

**Melissa Llarena**

Melissa Llarena is an executive coach and president of Career Outcomes Matter, which offers job-interview coaching to financial services professionals.

Use words that beef up your accomplishments. Saying you “identified an opportunity,” “persuaded senior leaders to fund a million-dollar solution” and “spearheaded its execution” sounds very different than simply saying you “researched an opportunity, recommended a solution and implemented a CRM solution.” Choose your words wisely based on the magnitude of impact.

Don’t send a super-long résumé. The content of your résumé is an employer’s first glance at how you prioritize. If you can’t keep it to one to two pages while using a legible font and comfortable margins, how good can you be at prioritizing your workload? Your ability to carefully curate your experiences and rank them by choosing what to display on top is a testament to how well you know what matters in a job and provides a clue about your ability to make tougher decisions.

Don’t send only a résumé. These days, a résumé is simply one tool you can use to entice employers to call you. I’m seeing candidates applying to jobs with both a résumé and a high-level view of what they would seek to accomplish during their first 90 days. Some firms are asking for this plan, while others firms are simply accepting this additional document to get a better sense of a candidate’s level of commitment.

**Roy Cohen**

Roy Cohen is the author of *The Wall Street Professional’s Survival Guide*.

Don’t make your résumé a generic “one-stop shop” that tries to accomplish everything. No single résumé can satisfy every opportunity. Focus it around what you want, a goal that you want to pursue.

Don’t leave out accomplishments. The reader evaluating your résumé wants to know that you have the skills to perform a function, as well as how well you can perform it. Make sure the résumé is accomplishment-focused.

Don’t include an arbitrary summary statement or objective. Not all résumés need one. If what you’re applying for is exactly what you’ve done before, this is a waste of valuable space — space that could be used to describe your passions and values.

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