

KEY ITEMS TO LEAVE OFF YOUR RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

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As you begin to think about changing jobs, one of the key tools you must have is a resume. This is an invaluable tool often used to respond to an advertised opening, introduce your skills and experience to a potential employer, or secure the interest of someone in your professional network.

Resumes should always be carefully prepared and thoroughly scrutinized before being shared with a potential employer. There are hundreds of excellent books and guides available to assist you in preparing your resume. This article is not about what to include in your resume but rather what must be left out.

In my position as an executive career consultant, I have seen thousands of resumes; all designed to gain the interest of an employer. The number of unintentional errors that we find in these resumes is astounding. For example, one young lady, writing about her skills as a word processor boasted ***“I am very conscientious and accurate.”*** A facility manager began his resume with this overview of his abilities: ***“I am the best qualified candidate for any positions that may be available. I have no reservations stating this.”*** Surely, an employer, having read this, would be most anxious to grant the manager an interview. Corporate real estate executives are not immune from making similar errors in judgment. One executive summed up his personal strengths at the end of his resume by boldly stating:

“ I am impatient with quibbling over minor details. I am stubborn on matters of principle and major objectives. I dislike routine thinking, unnecessary jobs, inefficient systems, and Democrats.”

Cover letters, intended to introduce the resume and give the applicant the chance to personalize the communication, may also contain some insights into a job candidate's real motivation and desire. A Senior financial analyst with extensive budget experience provided this glimpse into his true motivation in seeking a new position: ***“I want it completely understood that my objective is money. If there were two jobs available in your firm, one as a corporate treasurer and the other shoveling horse manure...I'll pick up the shovel if it pays more.”*** Another financial manager, who may have been away for a long time, wrote in his cover letter ***“My consideration will be given to relocation anywhere in the English-speaking world, and/or Washington, DC”*** One young campus facility manager, leaving his position after 9 years of service attempted to clearly state his geographic preferences when he wrote ***“I am interested in Florida or Alabama mostly. I would consider another area in the lower part of the U.S. I definitely do not want North Carolina, Tennessee, or anywhere else in the North.”***

These humorous quotes are fairly common and can easily slam shut windows of opportunity that might otherwise have been wide open. There are other things often included in resumes and cover letters however, while not as obvious, will still slam the door to opportunity. David Griswold, a Senior Career Consultant, recommends that the reasons for leaving previous positions be omitted from your resume and cover letters. Mr. Griswold suggests your reasons would be better explained during an interview when you can also talk about your need for greater opportunities and responsibilities. ***“I have seen some reasons listed in resumes that would give a potential employer pause in making a hiring decision. For example, in explaining why he was leaving the Air Force, a global real estate director wrote on his resume ‘Responsibility makes me nervous.’ A construction project manager, trying to explain his frequent job hopping wrote ‘...the last company made me a scapegoat – just like my 4 previous companies did.’ ”***

We see some resumes today that include a small photo of the applicant. No small photo can do justice to a job seeker and may, in fact, give employers a wrong impression. It would be better to omit photos and create a strong first impression during a face-to-face interview.

LTC George Goodson, USMC (Ret), now a Senior Career Consultant with Career Beginnings, Inc., recommends that empty assurances be left off resumes and cover letters. ***“Everybody thinks their***

character strengths are critically important. Traits such as loyalty, dedication, perseverance, and honesty, as well as excellent health, are commonly claimed by everyone and can be much better demonstrated through concrete examples during interviews.”

Some people include the date the resume was prepared or the date they would be available to begin work. Both dates are unnecessary on a resume and may inadvertently do more harm than good. These dates also indicate how long you have been searching for a position and should be omitted.

One of the biggest errors is the inclusion of a salary requirement. Any mention of a salary requirement should be omitted from all written communications. George Goodson, a tough negotiator, says, ***“everything is open to negotiation. Income package negotiations is expected in the executive job marketplace. Negotiating compensation packages is like playing poker. Never be the first to show your hand. Why would you possibly price yourself out of a promising position, or, even worse, show that you really don’t know what you’re worth by possibly under-pricing your talent? After the interview(s), after you’ve gotten a good look at the hiring company (and they you), after you’ve researched the marketplace to see what that type of position pays – then total compensation can be negotiated.”***

References should never be listed in a resume or cover letter or included on a separate sheet of paper and sent along with a resume. Instead, list them on a separate sheet of high quality paper and share them with the hiring organization only after you are confident that the potential job and company are worth going for. This is usually during an interview or when requested of you after the interview. To do otherwise runs the risk of violating your references' privacy and “burning them out” with phone calls from organizations you really aren’t interested in.

Since space is always limited on a resume, it is best to omit your hobbies and outside interests. They take up space that could be better used in describing your marketable accomplishments. Furthermore, some hobbies, such as skydiving, scuba diving, flying experimental aircraft, etc. may be perceived as too dangerous or time consuming and take you out of consideration for a position.

Of course, people from all walks of life make the same kinds of mistakes and errors. Over the last few years we have seen several comments on resumes and cover letters that were suitable for framing – and we did:

“Hobbies include golf and bride.”

“I am also a Notary Republic.”

“My work encompassed profit and loss entrees.”

“My firm currently employs 20 odd people.”

“They insisted that all employees get to work by 8:45 AM every morning – I just couldn’t work under those conditions.”



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