

# How To Update A Winning Resume

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With an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent, millions of people are looking for new jobs and career opportunities. But more people, means tougher competition. So, how can you help yourself to stand out? Host Michel Martin talks to veteran career coach and resume writer Laura DeCarlo, president of Career Directors International and personal finance expert Louis Barajas about crafting a successful resume.

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MICHEL MARTIN, host:

Now it's time for our money coach conversation. It's one of those months. Did you know that there's a month for just about anything, from mold awareness to cell phone courtesy to waffles? Now, normally we try to overlook these, but September happens to be international update your resume month. And we thought this might actually be a good time to talk about refreshing your resume. With an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent, millions of people are looking for new jobs in highly competitive markets.

So what can you do to stand out from the rest and submit a resume that can't be overlooked? We've invited two experts to help out with this. Laura DeCarlo is president of Career Directors International. She has over 16 years of experience in resume writing and career coaching. Also with us is our regular contributor on matters of personal finance and the economy, Louis Barajas. He's a personal finance expert and author of the forthcoming book "My Street Money."

Welcome to you both. Thanks for joining us.

LOUIS BARAJAS: Nice to be here.

Ms. LAURA DECARLO (Career Directors International): Thank you.

MARTIN: Now, Louis, can I just start with you? How big of a deal really is the resume? You've worked with a number of small businesses, for example. How big of a deal, really, is the resume?

BARAJAS: Oh, Michel, it's the biggest deal because the problem is that's what opens the door to your interview. And if you don't stick out like a sore thumb, if you don't put yourself in front of everybody else, you won't even get in through the front door.

MARTIN: Laura, what's your answer to that question?

Ms. DECARLO: I have to agree completely with Louis. It's completely an issue of whether you're going to stand out from a pack of what could be a hundred, could be even a thousand candidates. You know, what makes it easy for them to pick you out of all those documents that really leave an employer confused and overwhelmed?

MARTIN: I do want to emphasize the positive in what people should be doing, but Laura, I do want to ask - what is the common mistake you see in resumes that come before you?

Ms. DECARLO: Well, there's two. So I know you're saying, you know, what's the most common? But probably the one that hurts you the most is not selling yourself in the resume. Meaning not emphasizing not just what you've done, but how well you've done it. Telling the stories that are going to help an employer see how you're above other candidates with the same skill set and experience set.

The other is typos, which can turn a beautiful resume into, you know, something that can be laughed at over coffee.

MARTIN: And Louis Barajas, what about these software programs that sift through resumes. How does that work? Is there something that you can do to make sure that your resume makes it through those filters?

BARAJAS: Well, absolutely. What you have to do is you have to do research on the - not only on the job position, but also on the firm that you're going to go work for, the company that you want to work for. And you have to place in your resume key words that they're looking for. And so, you know, the biggest problem that I see with most people who are looking for jobs is that they haven't done enough research on the company. They haven't done enough research for the job position. And they're not using the words that the employer is looking for.

You have to put yourself on the other side and say, if I were hiring myself, what would I be looking for and then tailor your resume to that.

MARTIN: Laura, what about this whole question of - and there's been a number of surveys on this. So people who have ethnic names, for example, now, people can like it or not like it, but the reality of it is that there are - there's just data that shows that sometimes people would have ethnically identifiable names, that that hurts them in the job market. Now, obviously that's unfair. But what would you recommend that people do about that - if anything?

Ms. DECARLO: Well, you know, we never are going to call for, you know, doing anything that makes the person uncomfortable or that's not accurate. But if you have a nickname, you can put that in the top line in quotes. Further, a lot of times we'll have a name you can't tell if it's male or female, so we'll suggest putting Ms. or Mr. in front of it.

And then if it's, you know, if it really seems like they're, you know, they're emphasizing languages in their resume, and they may look like they're, you know, not an American citizen, we will even have them put at the end of their summary, you know, U.S. citizen.

MARTIN: What about this question of how long a resume should be? Laura, do you have a rule of thumb about that?

Ms. DECARLO: For most people the rule of thumb is one to two pages. And honestly, more commonly, to sell yourself, it does take two unless you're brand new into the work world.

MARTIN: Louis, do you have an opinion about that? Some people - this is one of those questions - it's

almost like - it's just like people have fights about this. You know, should it be - some people are adamant that it should only be one page. But then other people say, well, if you really want to let people know the breadth of your experience, then of course you should take two. Do you have an opinion about that?

BARAJAS: Yeah. I go back with common sense. I think that if you're, you know, you're the employer, you're going to be looking at 100 to 1,000 resumes, you're not going to be reading two pages. And what you're going to do is you're probably going to be looking at the first - the most important jobs that - or experience that that person has for your position that you're looking for. And I'm just going to look the top two positions most of the time because I need to sift through these. I don't have a lot of time.

So make the content as powerful as possible at the beginning. If you want to write two pages that's fine, but I think most people don't even get through the two pages.

MARTIN: Laura, you hear that? Louis is a one-page man.

(Soundbite of laughter)

BARAJAS: I'm a half-page man.

MARTIN: You're a half-page man.

(Soundbite of laughter)

Ms. DECARLO: Well, you know, and I would agree with that completely from the standpoint of I always tell jobseekers employers skim. You want to really capture their attention with a hook in the first third of the page. Make it clear what you're looking for, emphasize your unique selling propositions, you know, what makes you special? Why are you there? And your keywords and then get that most important recent job on the first page. And think of everything else as supportive for that person who's really interested in schooling and whatnot.

MARTIN: How do you address this other question around - we talked about the whole question of ethnically identifiable names. And obviously some ethnicities face bigger challenges than others. I don't think that's a secret. But then there's also the question of age. That we know, for example, data indicates that even older workers are more likely to be employed, but when they become unemployed, they're more likely to stay unemployed longer.

So how would you each recommend that someone address this question of age? I mean obviously the law says you can't discriminate against older workers, but many older workers feel that that's sort of irrelevant in a competitive marketplace. What do you recommend that people do about that, Laura?

Ms. DECARLO: Well, first of all, as Louis said, you know, he's looking at the first page of the resume, the most recent few positions and that really holds true. We really try to get jobseekers to recognize that employers are going to be more interested in what's happened recently and to loosen their holds on, you know, a 40-year career timeline. You may have companies from 20 years ago you want to mention you worked with in an, you know, an additional employment list at the bottom so that they can be talking points.

But you don't need to go back date-wise through your entire employment history or list every job you've held. And the same goes for education. There's only certain types of resumes where dates are mandatory on their resume, like, a federal resume.

MARTIN: And, Louis, what about the other side of the coin - the job hopper? Now, for people of certain generations it's not at all uncommon to jump around a bit in certain fields. It's not at all uncommon, but some people still might look askance at someone who's had quite a lot of jobs. How would you recommend that someone handle that?

BARAJAS: Well, I agree with you and if you're going from different industry to different industry that looks terrible on your resume. But if you're actually job hopping because you're getting the experience and you're moving to another level and a higher level where you're creating more results, you need to just write a story and tell people why you've been going from one position to the next position to get the best possible job that you've been looking for.

What I tell people, look, you don't want to write down what kind of occupation you want. You want to write down and let them know that you have an occu-passion. You want to let them know that this is a job that was meant for you and why it was meant for you. And then as Laura said: storytell. Tell people why it's so important because this is what you were meant to do.

MARTIN: I still don't get the whole typos thing. And I have to tell you that my particular bone to pick are people with misspellings and typos in a resume. It just sends me over the edge. And I just don't understand why people in this day and time can't spell check - if anybody heard of it. Friend.

But, Laura, finally, I do have to ask about - we've called you because we obviously trust your credentials, but it seems to me there are a number of people out there who are more than happy to take your money to say that they'll check your resume and so forth and have no credentials whatsoever. So what advice would you recommend to make sure you're getting your money's worth if you seek out coaching in this area? Very briefly, if you would.

Ms. DECARLO: Absolutely important that you verify the credentials of the person you are planning to work with.

MARTIN: How?

Ms. DECARLO: Look for - look, first of all, ask them, and if they have a website, look on their website for logos of their certifications. Find out who is the designating body for that organization if they don't link directly. And then contact that organization or go to that organization's website, like Career Directors International who create and update your resume.

MARTIN: All right, take you to the next step. Laura DeCarlo is president of the trade association - you just heard her tell it - Career Directors International. She joined us on the phone from her office in Melbourne, Florida.

Louis Barajas is one of our regular contributors on matters of personal finance and the economy. He's the author of the forthcoming book "My Street Money." And he joined us from Costa Mesa, California. Thank you both so much.

Ms. DECARLO: Thank you.

BARAJAS: Thank you, Michel.

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**Ken Lee (bigbearsfan)** wrote:

I really appreciate the fantastic effort to inform listeners on best practices when it comes to conducting a job search. The only thing I have found missing is advice for more experience listeners. I noticed that there was no mention of the difference between chronological resumes and functional resumes. Chronological resumes are great for newbies or people just getting started in their careers. However, I have 17 years of work history and am in the process of changing careers. A one-page chronological resume is inappropriate and does nothing to show off my skills. Can we have a piece addressing experienced listeners who may not necessarily benefit from basic job search advice and who may not be using a chronological resume? Keep up the great work.

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