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Make your search stand out

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CTW FEATURES

Baby-sitting, varsity track and advanced calculus might not appear under "relevant experience" on a professional's resume, but they could for a teenager seeking a summer job.

Professionalism is important for any job applicant. But teens need to find a way to balance professionalism with their reality of being an inexperienced student.

Laura DeCarlo, president of Career Directors International in Melbourne, Fla., advises teens to highlight their personalities, their work as students and their extracurricular activities.

DeCarlo helped a student create a resume that referenced her grade-point average, school activities, sports, transferable skills developed through baby-sitting, and her outgoing personality.

When the young woman went to a retail store to apply for a cashier position, she introduced herself and offered a resume in addition to filling out the application.

"The woman was so surprised," DeCarlo says. "The young lady ended up working at the customer service desk, which paid more than cashiering."

From being the captain of a sports team to serving in student government, "any activity that demonstrates responsibility is worth having on your resume," says Molly Delano Brennan, author of "Summer Jobs and Opportunities for Teenagers" (Da Capo, 2001). "It doesn't necessarily have to be some serious, 'real job.'"

Activities from baby-sitting for a friend to washing a neighbor's car every Friday demonstrate responsibility and commitment. "List any areas of leadership you've had no matter how small you think they may be," says Shawn Boyer, CEO of snagajob.com in Richmond, Va.

"They want to make sure you're not a couch potato. Anything you can do as a teenager to dispel the stereotype that you're lazy, you should do that," Boyer says.

Being upfront and honest about hours of availability, transportation issues and eligibility to work can make or break your job search, says Boyer.

Like professionals, teens should follow resume standards.

"The easiest way to get deep-sixed is to have typos on your application," Boyer says, adding that any e-mail addresses listed in contact information need to be work-appropriate.

Though showing up for a job interview in basketball practice attire might be more relaxing for a teen applicant, it easily can send the message to a prospective employer that the person is neither serious nor professional.

Brennan is shocked at the number of teen applicants who "show up to job interviews wearing ripped jeans and flip-flops."

Learning how to create a resume and how to approach finding a job in a professional manner can teach students the skills they need to apply to college or to pursue other activities after graduation.

Listing post-graduation plans on a resume doesn't make sense for an experienced professional. But for some teenagers, conveying ambition is just another way to set themselves apart from other applicants.

"If they're applying for a job that they feel passionate about, then a personal statement could be really effective," Brennan says.

Boyer recommends that teen applicants be forthright about their post-summer plans.

"A lot of employers like to keep people on past the summertime," Boyer says. "If it's a position that you may want to have after the summertime, we always make sure to encourage people to tell them (employers) that as quickly as they can."

Brennan and Boyer both suggest doing mock interviews to prepare for the real thing and researching the company to help pinpoint questions. Boyer says students should follow an interview with a handwritten thank-you note.

They also should not wait to begin their search for a summer job.

"A lot of teenagers, especially high school students, have the tendency to wait too long to start their search process, and when they do it, they're too narrow when they cast their nets," Boyer says. "So, start it now. And cast your net wide."

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