

How to “Build” a Marketable Background

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Simply writing or composing a resume is the arduous process of documenting your years of experience and training into an attractive, easily readable, and hopefully motivational document that will inspire employers to offer you an interview. The real work, however, comes in the actual life experiences, training, and skills you are able to acquire that actually make up your resume.

Throughout your education and career, you will be able, if you are resourceful and dedicated, to find many ways to “build” your resume. The most often cited example is volunteer work. A young person who graduates from a medical program will be much more employable if he or she has also volunteered at a local hospital prior to graduation. For students, internships, whether paid or volunteer, are often the deciding factor in determining which newly-graduated applicants will be hired. Volunteering to help a professor with a research project, keeping a list of papers written, maintaining a respectable GPA, joining and serving in school organizations, and other leadership activities are also immensely persuasive to personnel directors. Even for non-students and seasoned career applicants, those who can show job-related volunteerism, additional training courses, community service, or other non-employment experience are generally given higher consideration. Examples include attending trade shows, seminars, or conferences, and volunteering at a business related to the field you are pursuing. In fact, more and more teens are now beginning the process of “building” their resume, and many high schools are now conducting career preparation and resume development courses. In these courses, students are encouraged to begin the process of looking at a wide range of activities as helpful in building their résumés. Examples include youth jobs such as grass-cutting, child care, or caring for neighbors’ pets, joining clubs and youth church groups, community volunteerism, visiting museums, attending various events, and enrolling in special youth leadership programs.

When applying for or deciding to accept a particular job, the decision-making process should be guided by more than the salary, working conditions, benefits, or similar considerations. Since the average career now will likely consist of 10 or more jobs over a 40 year period, the primary consideration in taking or seeking a position, assuming it meets your basic salary requirements, should be what it will do for you developmentally. The first consideration is, “How will it look on my resume?” For example, if you really are looking for a corporate management position, accepting an interim position as manager of “Mike’s Lounge” may not be wise, despite the pay. You would be far better off accepting a lesser position, if you can afford it, with a company offering promotional opportunities. Within a year or two, you should be able, through volunteer activities within the company and elsewhere, to demonstrate your managerial abilities and become highly promote-able. For example, one corporate employee in a lower paid position volunteered to help coordinate the company’s United Way campaign and was extremely successful in increasing donations. Her efforts paid off in being selected for the next management trainee slot, since she had demonstrated leadership, teamwork, and enthusiasm in a highly visible way.

Employers have demonstrated time and again that they want to hire and will give preference to “doers” and those with the extra energy and initiative to reach beyond the normal, expected, and predictable routes of education, experience, and training. Examples abound of individuals who have landed reporting jobs at newspapers through volunteerism, taking time to cover the Friday night football games on a volunteer basis, offering to serve as weekend unpaid helper in the editorial room, or any number of other ways of “opening the door.” Of course, a degree in Journalism is more frequently mandatory, but as we all know, even a degree in a particular specialty or field won’t guarantee a meaningful or developmental position in that field.