Resumes Are Bait, Make Count

Idea In Short

Treat your resume as bait designed to earn an interview. Quantify every achievement, organize content from most to least important, and tell a coherent story. Tailor each version to the specific role you pursue.

The Purpose of a Resume

The entire purpose of a resume is to get invited for an interview. Getting an interview means the fish took a bite at the bait. When you reach your late twenties or early thirties and beyond, you are not looking for jobs where a recruiter hires you based on a piece of paper. The goal is to get in front of the hiring manager and create a connection. The resume equals bait.

Recruiters at Big Four consulting firms review hundreds of resumes every year. Roughly ninety percent go into the trash. They spend less than fifteen seconds on a cover letter and thirty seconds on a resume. The review process is quick and violent. Your resume must survive this gauntlet.

Good Resumes Are Rare

Anyone in Human Resources [HR], MBA admissions, or recruiting will tell you that resumes come in all shapes and sizes. They are formatted differently and vary in length. Despite this variety, resumes quickly sort into good ones and bad ones. The difference is not subtle. Good resumes share four characteristics that bad ones lack.

Achievements Quantified and Organized as Story

A good resume rests on four pillars. It must contain real achievements, quantify them, organize them strategically, and present them as a coherent story. Each pillar reinforces the

others. Remove one and the structure weakens.

Achievements Matter Most

Your resume must have content. You cannot bake this resume cake without flour, eggs, and water. What kind of work do you do? Where have you worked? How would you explain your accomplishments simply? Can you demonstrate commitment, focus, and other admirably worth-hiring characteristics?

If you lack achievements in your work history that you are proud of, that is a different problem. Time to buckle up and get good work done. Be so good they cannot ignore you. As a friend likes to say, work like you give a damn.

Quantification Separates Winners

This is where most people fail. There should be numbers on your resume. If you improved throughput of a process, by how much? If you increased sales, what percentage off what base in what time frame? If you managed a team, how many people? Resume bullets without quantification are weak. They show a lack of accomplishment or an unwillingness to measure what you attempt to manage.

Employers want results. How will your contribution affect Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization [EBITDA]? How effective have you been in previous positions? Are you thinking like an owner? Like a good acting teacher might say, show, do not tell. Peter Drucker famously observed that what gets measured gets managed, a principle that applies directly to resume writing 1. Without numbers, your claims lack credibility.

The PAR and STAR Framework

The Problem, Action, Result [PAR] framework, also known as Situation, Task, Action, Result [STAR], is a super valuable technique learned in MBA programs. Each bullet on your resume should describe what problem you faced, what action you took, and what result you achieved. This simple algorithm forces specificity and eliminates vagueness 2.

Too often people write vague things on their resumes that could apply to anyone. They write

that they were responsible for some boring thing. Nobody cares. What did you do? What problems did you solve? Why were you excellent? Compare these two fictitious bullets about the same achievement.

A good bullet reads: Integrated disparate customer information from three databases into a master file which led to a 12 percent increase in customer contacts and 8 percent increase in close rates for $450,000 in incremental margin. A bad bullet reads: Responsible for customer data and information and marketing projects. The difference is unmistakable. One tells a story with numbers. The other says nothing.

Organization and Formatting

A good resume must look clean. No spelling errors, including the distinction between compliment and complement. No typos, including incorrect usage of their, there, and they're. No parallel structure problems where verbs shift to nouns mid-list. The formatting must be professional and consistent.

Organize your achievements from most important to least. People remember the first and last things in a list. Items in the middle get lost. The content needs structure that is both logical and sensible. Is there a progression of responsibility? Are the sizes of assignments, roles, and achievements appropriate for the new role you seek? Does the resume pass the sniff test?

Your Resume Tells a Story

Your resume needs to tell a story. How does the Venn diagram of your skills, experience, passions, and quirks combine into a compelling narrative of what you can do for this employer? What kind of work do you do, and how good are you at it? Did you progress in your career, or did you bounce from place to place because you did not fit?

Large consulting firms interview at a half dozen business schools on the same day. Dozens of senior managers and principals interview hundreds of candidates. At the end of the day, what do you want your recruiter to say about you? How will they advocate for you against the hundreds of other candidates at dozens of other schools? What is the elevator pitch you would love for them to tell their colleagues? That is your story.

Have More Than One Resume

If you are applying for consulting, marketing, and strategic planning roles, do not use the same resume. Treat the resume reader like a picky customer. They will not buy what looks odd or out of place. There are tons of resumes to choose from. Tailor your resume and your story for each audience. Work at it. If a resume is bait, would you use the same bait to catch different kinds of fish?

At MBA programs, career services beat this principle into students' heads. Each bullet on the resume should be interesting enough for the recruiter to ask about it. Each bullet is a teaser for the next question in the interview. You must have a good story for each part of your resume. Do not put anything on your resume that you cannot discuss in depth. Be able to answer the question of what difference it made.

Hone Your Resume Relentlessly

This is tough work. When helping someone with a resume, it often takes several revision passes. You need to be willing to rewrite it until it approaches perfection. If you want to see examples, search for MBA resume book PDF online and study tons of examples from sharp candidates who spent hours perfecting their resumes.

The concept that measurement drives improvement extends beyond business metrics to personal career documents. As the measurement paradox suggests, what gets measured gets managed, even when that measurement is imperfect 3. Quantify your achievements, measure your impact, and let the numbers speak. Happy fishing.

- 1A-Z Quotes
- 2Resume Worded
- 3Ness Labs

Summary

Your resume is bait. The entire purpose is to secure an interview. Quantify achievements, organize them strategically, tell a story, and tailor each version. Be so good they cannot

ignore you.