Articulating Your Personal Value Proposition

How to Stand Out in the Job Search Crowd

By Lauren Still, MBA, CTACC
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
Examples ............................................................................................................................................... 2
Centered ................................................................................................................................................ 4
  Exercise: Core Values ......................................................................................................................... 5
  Exercise: Brainstorming Talents and Skills ....................................................................................... 6
  Exercise: Themes ............................................................................................................................... 7
Compelling ........................................................................................................................................... 8
  Make It Relevant .............................................................................................................................. 8
  How You Do What You Do ............................................................................................................... 9
Enlisting The Listener .......................................................................................................................... 9
  Exercise: Problems You Solve & Opportunities You Create ............................................................ 10
  Exercise: Communication Styles ...................................................................................................... 11
  Exercise: Crafting a Value Proposition ............................................................................................. 12
Courageous ......................................................................................................................................... 13
  Exercise: Be Bold ............................................................................................................................ 13
Clear ................................................................................................................................................... 14
  Exercise: Language is Everything ..................................................................................................... 14
  Exercise: Clarity Check ..................................................................................................................... 14
Concise ................................................................................................................................................. 16
  Exercise: Polishing the Finished Product ......................................................................................... 16
Next Steps .......................................................................................................................................... 18
Introduction

When you are in a job search or a career transition, you spend a lot of time looking for a job. What does that process really look like? It’s not like you’re literally out turning over rocks to see if your dream job is underneath!

What people really mean when they say “I’m looking for a job” is “I’m talking to people to find out who knows about my next job.” Think about it – even if you read about a great job online, it’s not your job until you interview for it and get an offer – all of which requires talking to people. But most of the time you are more likely to find a great job by talking to people about what they’re doing, what you want to do, and what you bring to the table. A vast majority of jobs are not advertised in the paper or online. The only way to find out about them is to talk to people.

The most important tool in your toolbox when starting a job search is to have a clearly defined and articulated value proposition. A value proposition summarizes who you are, what you do, and most importantly, the value you provide to your employer or customers.

A value proposition is critical to a successful job search because it:

- Allows you to confidently and easily talk about who you are and what you have to offer
- Makes you stand out from the crowd
- Becomes the key test for every portion of your resume, and
- Helps you come across as professional and organized

Your value proposition must be:

- Centered
- Compelling
- Courageous
Articulating Your Value Proposition

- Clear
- Concise

The remainder of this document will discuss these elements of a good value proposition and help you start articulating who you are, what you do, and why a potential employer needs you.

EXAMPLES

Of course, there are strong value propositions and weak value propositions. Below are some examples of both:

Someone who says “I improve the customers’ experience” would be more appealing to a potential employer if instead they said: "I help businesses significantly increase their profitability by tapping underserved markets within their existing client base."

Likewise, a job seeker who says “I am a project manager” will not attract as much interest as a candidate who introduces himself or self with: “I bring clarity and strong planning to the chaos of start-up environments and new product launches to deliver on time and to budget.”

Similarly, a potential employer may have a hard time working out what someone means by “I analyze databases to determine the overall depth of data and where the data came from so we can look at what we can use it for,” when they could say instead “I evaluate your existing business information to show you where you can improve operations and save money.”

You get the picture. The weaker value propositions either describe the position or the activity, or are unclear. The stronger value propositions clearly describe what specific benefit the job seeker will bring to the company.
Articulating Your Value Proposition

(e.g., projects delivered on time and within budget) and how they do it (e.g., a talent for clear thinking and strong organization and planning skills).

Your value proposition should give the listener:

1. An immediate understanding of the benefit they would get if they hired you.
2. An interest in who you are and how you are different from your competition.
3. A sense of urgency to take the next step.

Let’s get started!
The statements we make about who we are, what we do, and what we offer a potential employer must be honest and reflect our values and talents. Your value proposition and the conversations you have around it will be more powerful and will connect with the listener when they are truthful and sincere.

What are your core values? Are they reflected in what you’re trying to do and how you present yourself? When your way of talking about yourself reflects your most important values (you don’t need to state them), the listener will hear an essence of honest that will build their confidence in you and will drive them to want to help you.

Likewise, when you’ve done some soul-searching about what it is you are really, truly good at, where your inherent talents lie, and what you want to do with those in the world, that comes across as well. Also, when you talk about your accomplishments and what you can do for a potential employer, you will have passion and energy in your voice, and that becomes contagious to those with whom you are talking.

So before you move on to the next section, sense-check your statement and make sure it is coming from your true and honest self. It will show.
EXERCISE: CORE VALUES

Write down ten of your personal values. Some examples of values are: Integrity, Peace, Wealth, Happiness, Love, Recognition, Family, and Status, but there are many, many more. Take the time to think about this.

_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________

Now, circle the 3-5 values on this list that are most important to you, the ones that guide your actions and reflect the true core of who you are. These are your core values. See if you can narrow it down to just three.
EXERCISE: BRAINSTORMING TALENTS AND SKILLS

In the space below (and on extra pages if needed), write down as many things as you can think of that reflect your inherent talents and skills. Don’t censor yourself, just write down everything that comes to mind. Here are a few questions to ask yourself to get started:

- What am I really, truly good at?
- What would my mother say I’m great at? My best friend? My boss?
- What do I love to do? What makes me excited and passionate?
- What comes easily to me? What tasks don’t feel like work?
- What am I called to do in this world?
- What commonalities run through my past jobs, social involvement, clubs, etc?
EXERCISE: THEMES

When you look at your core values and your brainstorming exercise, what common themes emerge? Some examples of themes are “analyzing data,” “working with diverse groups,” and “finding creative solutions.” Jot down the themes you identify in the space below.
Compelling

The most important part of a personal value proposition is that it be compelling to the listener.

compel·ling (adj)

1. attracting strong interest and attention

2. tending to make somebody do something, make something happen, or be necessary ¹

We want our value proposition to attract strong interest and attention from potential employers and people in our network who can help us locate that great new position. But the second part of the definition is at least as important: we also want the listener to take some form of action – for example, they could give us the name of someone they know who could use our skills, ask us to interview for a job, invite us in to meet others in the organization, or call someone who they think can help in our job search.

MAKE IT RELEVANT

A listener will be especially interested in what you have to say when it is relevant to them. In particular, if you are describing something you can do for them that they really need, you will get their attention. Colleen Stanley (www.salesleadershipdevelopment.com) states that people don’t care about what you do, they only care about problems you solve and opportunities you create. This may sound harsh or cold, but ask yourself: do you buy services from people because you like them, or because they can solve a problem for you?

¹ Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
HOW YOU DO WHAT YOU DO

To strengthen your value proposition, share (briefly) how you will accomplish what you are stating. This does not have to be a full report of all the steps you will take, but rather a clarification that gives the listener confidence that you have done it before and can do it again.

From the examples in the Introduction, one job seeker used this technique to say “by tapping underserved markets within their existing client base.” The statement may not be detailed, but it tells the listener that the job seeker knows where to start in order to deliver on his or her commitment, and allows an opening to ask for more detail in an interview.

By being able to share how you plan to deliver, it provides a level of confidence, and projects expertise to the listener.

ENLISTING THE LISTENER

When you have a compelling value proposition, you will often find that the listener jumps into the conversation with questions, suggestions, or even an offer to help. If not, invite the listener to engage in helping you, either by asking directly or by providing examples of who might benefit from what you have to offer.

Here are some follow-on questions/statements that you can use:

- I don’t know if any of these are challenges for you or not...
- Who do you know who might be facing these challenges?
- You know when you’re talking to a colleague and they say...
- One of the most rewarding experiences I’ve had in this area was...
EXERCISE: PROBLEMS YOU SOLVE & OPPORTUNITIES YOU CREATE

Think about what you do (or want to do) at work, and ask yourself:

- What problems do I solve for the company and its customers?
- What opportunities do I create?
- What would happen if no one does it?
- Are there any metrics that I can use? (Percentage of revenue or profits, decrease in waste, time saved, etc.)
- What is the business trying to accomplish with this role?
- What else is really bugging them or is painful in their business? Can you solve it for them?

Now list the top 3 benefits you provide, and think about what happens if someone doesn’t have that benefit and what the impact would be (adapted from Colleen Stanley).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Opposite of Benefit</th>
<th>Impact of Not Having the Benefit (Emotion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Generate truly qualified sales leads.</td>
<td>Don’t know who are real potential buyers and who are just window shopping.</td>
<td>Frustrated with marketing efforts, feel like just “spinning wheels”, disappointed in sales.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are the basis for crafting your value proposition. Now you just need to take into account people’s learning or communication styles and put it into words.
EXERCISE: COMMUNICATION STYLES

Different people learn in different ways, and you rarely know what style will work best with a listener when you have just met him or her. But you can keep in mind different communication styles and incorporate this knowledge into your value proposition to have the greatest impact on the most people.

The primary learning/communication styles are:

1. Auditory (sound/hearing)
2. Kinesthetic (touch/feeling)
3. Visual (seeing)

In other words, some people will understand quickly and remember what you said when they hear the problem or solution. Others need to touch or feel the issue, and others need to see the problem to best understand it.

List how someone might hear, see, or feel the problem you solve, the solution itself, or the opportunity you create:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hear</th>
<th>See</th>
<th>Feel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Create a short, concise summary of what you offer, trying to use as many of the communication styles as you can:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
EXERCISE: CRAFTING A VALUE PROPOSITION

The value proposition (sometimes this can also be called a 30-second commercial) is a sentence that easily rolls off your tongue and encapsulates the value you provide. Here is a sample format you may wish to use to get you started:

I work with ________________________________
who are ________________________________
to _________________________________
by _________________________________.

Create 3-5 value propositions in the space below, highlighting the top benefits you offer and using multiple communication styles if possible.

Choose the one that feels exciting to you and most compelling to potential employers.
Now that you’ve begun to craft your value proposition, ask yourself how bold it is. How courageous have you been in telling people about your real value to the world and work? Have you held back, not wanting to brag?

Well, stop right there. If you won’t go to bat for yourself, how can you expect others to? You must cast off the mantle of modesty for this exercise. When you’re talking to a close friend or a colleague and you say “well, I did pretty well” when you actually hit a home run in a presentation, those closest to you might see through the humility and draw out the real story, but a virtual stranger will more likely take your statement at face value. They will hear “pretty good” and think “this person sounds competent, but not a star.” You want them leaving the conversation thinking “this is a star I have to have on my team (or my friend at XYZ company needs on his team)!”

If your modesty is getting in the way, ask friends and colleagues what you’re known for, what you’re really great at, where you excel. Then use their “testimonial” in your value proposition, preferably in the first person.

**EXERCISE: BE BOLD**

Are you ready to be bold? Try rewriting your statement taking it to the next level, pushing the boundary of what you’d normally allow yourself to say about your talents. Be truthful, but immodest.
Your personal value proposition must clearly communicate who you are and what you have to offer. Well-crafted value propositions help the listener quickly understand what it is you want and can do, and they are more likely to be able and want to help you get it. If the value proposition is imprecise, the listener may get the wrong impression, glaze over, or simply not be able to take action on what you’ve just told them.

**EXERCISE: LANGUAGE IS EVERYTHING**

Here are some tips for making your value proposition clear to your listener:

- Use simple, non-technical language that anyone can understand and is easy to say out loud. As the saying goes, “don’t utilize ‘utilize’ when you can use ‘use.’ Make sure any technical jargon is replaced with layman’s language.
- Use active language rather than passive statements
- If there is something that truly differentiates you and your approach, state it. Don’t assume that the listener will pick it up in the discussion.

Revise your value proposition as needed.

**EXERCISE: CLARITY CHECK**

Now for the nail-biting bit: try out your value proposition on five people who don’t know what you do. If all of them understand what you do (they seem to “get it,” ask relevant questions, or jump in with great ideas for who you
should talk to), then you’re on the right track. If they “glaze over,” answer with a simple “uh-huh” or “oh” or ask questions or make suggestions that are way off base from where you want to go, then the clarity portion of your value proposition needs work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Name**: [Enter Name]
- **Reaction**: [Enter Reaction]
- **Feedback**: [Enter Feedback]
Concise

A good value proposition also needs to be concise. If your value proposition is not short, sweet, and to the point, you may lose the interest of the listener before they learn what they need to from you. Your value proposition should ideally be one sentence.

You can always add follow-on information, statements or questions once you get the listener’s attention, but you may not have much more than one or two sentences unless you get them interested in what you do. If you are having trouble articulating what you do in one sentence, consider:

- Asking what one piece the listener will most care about.
- Is there one word that describes what you do?
- What problem do you solve for people?
- If you had to reduce it to 3-4 words, what would those words be? (Then build up the sentence from there)
- Are you using more words than you need to? (Eg., Change “in order to” to simply “to”)
- Asking someone who is a good wordsmith to help you pare it down to the core essence.

EXERCISE: POLISHING THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Read your value proposition out loud several times, in front of the mirror, and to other people. Does it roll off the tongue? If it feels awkward or convoluted it is time to simplify your message. Pare your statement down to one, easy-to-say sentence.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Sometimes this step is the hardest in the process, but if you take the time to really craft and rework your message into a simple, short, interesting, bold, and truthful statement (in other words, Compelling, Courageous, Centered, Clear and Concise!), you will truly stand out from the crowd of jobseekers and allow others to be more effective in helping you find your ideal job. All from one little sentence!
Next Steps

I hope you have found the information in this e-book interesting, inspiring, and helpful. You are well on your way to standing out from the crowd in your job search.

Here are some next steps and resources that you may wish to consider:

- Find an accountability partner (a friend, a coach, etc.)
- Enroll in our **Rock Your Job Search** Self-Study Course or Coaching Program
- Read our **Attract Your Ideal Job** e-book
- Call to find out about our Personal Branding, Social and Emotional Intelligence, and Work-Life Balance coaching
- Find out more about our **New Job Integration** programs, which teach you the art and science of being successful in your new role
- Ask about how we can help with your Career Planning and Career Management

Please contact me with any questions, and ask how I can be of further support to you in attracting your ideal job!

Rock your role and enjoy your success...

**Lauren**

Lauren Still  
President and Strategic Career Coach  
Careerevolution Group  
303-325-5765