

CAREER SEARCH AMERICA

CAREER TRANSITION TOOLBOX WHITEPAPER

A CAREER CHANGE RESUME IS DIFFERENT:

HOW TO WRITE A STRATEGIC, SMART AND
SAVVY CAREER TRANSITION RESUME



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INTRODUCTION

Before we get into the process of writing your career change resume, let's get one thing straight: Nobody likes writing resumes. First of all, if you need a resume, it means you're out of work or soon will be. That's no fun. And if you're moving through an uncomfortable phase of your transition process, the last thing you want to do is look backwards, which, of course, you'll have to do to write your resume. No! You want to leap ahead, start in on your new job, get settled and get to work.

And a career change resume may seem even more intimidating. After all, you're not simply moving to a new job within your field, you're moving out in an entirely new direction. You have to expect--and plan for--a certain amount of skepticism, both internally and externally.

SO BEFORE GOING ANY FARTHER, LET'S DO A QUICK RE-FRAME.

Changing careers and changing jobs are two different things. While embarking on a new career does pose challenges, it also brings exciting and energizing possibilities and the chance to meet new colleagues and friends.

It may also help to know that you're not alone. Nowadays a typical employee goes through anywhere from five to eight career changes...and that doesn't even count the job changes within those careers. It's happening everywhere. People are on the move from dead end jobs to rewarding new careers. You're in good company.

Of course, career change isn't usually easy and it does take time. You need to be prepared. You need to have a solid understanding of yourself and your abilities. You need to know the job market and current economic and hiring trends.

And you need to have the right tools. A effective, professional resume that anticipates and proactively responds to any possible concern relating to career change is essential.

WHAT IS AN EFFECTIVE RESUME?

First of all, let's be clear about what's not...how not to write a resume! The most common—and worst!—type we see from clients is a boring list of “the things I did.” This is a resume-to-nowhere except frustration, disappointment and failure.

Better, but still not good enough, is the resume that says: “Here are the things I did in my last job (or jobs), and here are the results these things achieved.” OK, we're moving in the right direction, but we're not there yet.

Why? Because list of results all by itself doesn't mean much in isolation. This type of resume lacks context; it doesn't explain why the accomplished mattered. It doesn't answer the all-important “So What” question.

A CAREER CHANGE RESUME IS DIFFERENT

A career change resume has to do all of that and more. All good resumes showcases meaningful results by saying: “Here are the things I did. Here are the results we achieved, and this is why those results mattered.” Furthermore, a career change resume has to make the case that your ability to achieve meaningful results—in other words, your value as a employee—

-is transferable to a new, perhaps an entirely new, situation. This transferability spin must be applied strategically to every aspect of your resume. **Here's how.**

IDENTIFY YOUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Career expert and author, Richard Nelson Bolles – suggests there are three broad groups you can slot your skills into:

1. *People* – related to managing, communicating, training and teaching, coaching, informing
2. *Data* – everything related to researching, record keeping, compiling, translating, storing data
3. *Things* – ability to operate machinery, computers, equipment, tools, assembling and disassembling, repairing, recycling

Think about these categories. Chances are your previous work included some mixture of all of them, but for the job you're applying for now, which do you want to emphasize.

You can highlight your most desirable skills under your qualifications profile. Follow this with short bulleted descriptions of your key strengths and competencies.

Again, make it easy for the person on the other side of the table to see exactly how you fit in and the value you bring.

FORMAT YOUR RESUME TO DIRECT ATTENTION

Use headlines, bullets and indented lists to prominently display your transferable skills. But be careful: resumes today are routinely scanned for search systems and databases. Avoid anything that will make it difficult to scan including underlines, check marks or anything other than solid bullets, or non-standard fonts.

By bulleting your transferable skills, you are giving visual aids to the hiring/interviewing manager and leveraging keywords that may resonate with him or her. The manager will then review the other sections of the resume to find more detailed information.

How should you list your transferable skills? Prospective employers tend to scan resumes quickly, so make their job easier. Begin with a “qualifications summary,” information for the manager reviewing the resume that immediately clarifies your level and what industry area you are interested in. Follow with a short list (6 - 9 bullets) which provides specifics and shows clearly the value you bring to the table. These skills must be relevant to the specific job you're applying for.

TARGET RELEVANT SKILLS TO EACH OPPORTUNITY

Do some market research and understand what employers are looking for. One of the best ways to do this is to read through ads in papers and trade publications, and check out position descriptions used on Monster.com that are relevant to your target audience. When scrolling through the various postings, keep a running list of what's hot and what's not.

If you have an interest in a particular industry or company in that industry, go to their website and read their latest press releases, marketing material, any published documents that tell you what they are looking for and the language they use to describe what's important to them. You can then use this language in your cover letter, resume and during an interview to mirror these values and priorities.

Next, match your skills to those that are in demand. In this way you are building a database of core competencies to incorporate

into your career change resume. Don't limit yourself to skills from work. Think about everything you do.

DOCUMENT YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Include examples of how effectively you used these skills and the value they brought to your company.

Some career coaches ask the following questions to substantiate the strength of the skills:

- *Challenge* – what challenges did you face?
- *Action* – what steps were taken?
- *Results* – what results were created?

ANSWER THE “SO WHAT” QUESTION

For example, if you were part of a team that was responsible for cost-cutting ideas, it adds much more weight to your resume if you can point out the bottom-line savings that resulted from these smart suggestions.

Or if you were responsible for coming up with eco-friendly packaging, point to the positive impact on your community and environment, mention any favorable media coverage, awards or consumer feedback.

SUMMARY

Bear in mind that above all else, your career change resume needs to convince the hiring manager that the value you bring to your new position is clearly derived from your transferable skills and is grounded in the depth and breadth of your hard-won expertise.

Write it well, and your next employer will see you not as just another job applicant, but as one who brings the answer to a problem, a solution they've been waiting for.

Pull that off, and you've hit the jackpot.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Recognize that frequent career change is the new reality
- Understand the difference between an ordinary resume and a career change resume
- Identify your transferable skills
- Format your resume to direct attention to the value you bring.
- Target your resume to each new opportunity.
- Include specific examples of your accomplishments.
- Answer the “So What Question” by putting your accomplishments in a meaningful context.