

CHAPTER 10

Developing an Effective Resume

Foundational Thoughts on the Concept of Resumes

The resume has been described as a persuasive summary of your qualifications for employment (Locker and Kaczmarek, 2009). Consequently, if you are in the job market, having the resume up to date makes you look well organized and prepared. When you are already employed, having an updated resume enables you to take advantages of opportunities on the spur of the moment. And, if you are a student, building your resume is important because it helps you become more conscious of what you need to do in the next couple of years or so to develop yourself as an attractive candidate (2009). Yet, for many people, writing a resume is a painful process.

For years, I have respectfully suggested to people who come to me for advice on writing their resume that writing a resume should be a healing process; a point that I will come back to. A successful job and/or career change is no longer based on how many resumes you send out but is largely predicated upon how effectively you brand and market your most valuable resource—you. Effectively communicating who you are and what will make you stand above the crowd takes time and skill.

Often I am asked to critique an individual's resume and/or curriculum vita. Unfortunately they all look the same, which is not good. When structuring your resume and I am going to include in this concept curriculum vitas for those of you who use vitas versus resumes, you have to first be reflective about who you are, what you have done in your life, and where you want to go. Yet, I continue to be amazed at the traditional ways in which people are taught to write a resume, even when we are positioned in economies that are highly competitive and the same holds true when writing the vita.

Over the years I have participated in academic searches, I have found it easy to “sift” through the “blue smoke and mirrors” that people try to promote in their curriculum vitas. For example, far too often I have seen academics “lump” together their conference presentations and proceedings with their publications. Yet, search committees typically want to know what journal articles, books, book chapters, manuscripts, and conference proceedings you have produced—for example, your publication record in addition to your conference presentations. Unfortunately, if search committees have any modicum of experience your merging of information is the first thing they will focus on, and the lumping together of information that should be separated can invoke a negative impression regarding the applicant.

There are two fundamental truths that are associated with the resume and/or curriculum vita processes. If correctly written, a well-structured resume or vita will constructively point out what you have done in life that makes you a unique and contributing human being. If you choose to articulate who you are from the deepest recesses of your soul, the resume or vita will reflect your magnificence and also give a glimpse to employers your future capabilities. The second and equally critical point is that a well-constructed resume or vita also should become a critical component of your roadmap, if you choose to routinely revisit it. I have always made it a practice of monthly viewing my resume when I was in the corporate sector and my vita when I came to the academy.

When you take the time to frequently review your resume or vita, it becomes a very personal reminder of what you need to do; for example, requisite next steps in your strategy designed to further develop you. Let me provide you with an example. A few years ago, a distant relative came to my home town in an attempt to relocate. This person possessed both an undergraduate and graduate degree from very reputable institutions. However, she had no outside activities, was underemployed for years, lacked computer skills, and had no accomplishments that she could report on the resume. As hard as I tried to extrapolate competencies and accomplishments . . . there was nothing there, which meant that there was very little that was marketable about her. Even in a good economy she could not find a job because she never positioned herself to stand above the crowd in any manner.

This outcome was a learning experience for her. She had no choice but to return home. Yet, upon her return, she immediately began developing a very different personal strategy to evoke positive change in her life. I have always said to those I counsel that even if you come to the