

Chapter 8

Three Approaches to Accomplishments

Secret: A triage approach will generate the best set of accomplishments.

Preparing to Write Your Resume

Before you begin writing your resume, you have four important things to do:

1. Gather career information.
2. Define your accomplishments.
3. Refine and quantify your accomplishments.
4. Decide on the resume format.

This chapter focuses on Steps 1 and 2. Step 3 is covered in Chapter 9; Step 4 is covered in Chapter 10.

Gather Career Information

To facilitate the resume writing process, begin by collecting data about job titles, years of employment, employers, educational institutions, degrees, and credentials, along with performance reviews. Collect old resumes and deal sheets, your corporate or firm bio, as well as any other pertinent information.

Define Your Accomplishments

A resume needs to highlight a combination of achievements that conveys your unique style, personality, and contributions. A subjective list of adjectives or standard job descriptions won't do this. Accomplishments will.

Accomplishments reveal and demonstrate your skills, identify results and outcomes, and prepare you for the interview. Trying to weasel out of the important, though tedious, work of describing accomplishments is a mistake. My clients have been known to adopt the language and achievements of sample resumes I provide for them. They don't get away with it. Shortcutting the process or relying only on past performance reviews or old resumes cheats no one but you.

You can generate the best and most comprehensive set of accomplishments by using all of the following three approaches:

1. Greatest accomplishments
2. Skill-based accomplishments
3. Expertise-based accomplishments

Most people use only the first strategy, but using all three and triangulating among them will produce the best results.

Greatest Accomplishments

Make a list of your most significant accomplishments. Think back over your career at the achievements that stand out, such as:

- Landed an unlandable deal
- Resolved a costly conflict between your company and a competitor
- Won a case against all odds
- Produced an award-winning advertising campaign
- Guided the restructuring of stock option plans
- Cut operating costs by 20 percent

62 PREPARING THE TOOLS TO FIND THE RIGHT JOB

What achievements made you proudest? What contributions received the most recognition? What results do people still talk about? Remember that your greatest accomplishments don't necessarily reflect where you spent the most time, nor are they necessarily the most recent. What they should do is represent where you have made the greatest contribution.

To jog your memory, think about people you've worked with, positions you've held, events, awards, and so on. If you need additional inspiration, consult performance reviews, colleagues, bosses, maybe even a proud parent.

Skill-Based Accomplishments

Once you've listed your greatest accomplishments, identify your greatest skills, strengths, and areas of knowledge, using information from the Skills Inventory Worksheet that you completed in Chapter 4. Some or all of your greatest and most enjoyed skills should be the basis for accomplishment statements.

Accomplishments representing a specific instance in which you used one of your greatest and most enjoyed skills to produce a measurable result belong on your resume. Suppose that negotiating is a highly developed skill of yours and one you enjoy using a great deal. Think of a specific instance in which your negotiating skill led to a measurable result.

For example, consider the time you managed to resolve a problem with an outstanding bill without losing either the money or the client. Or perhaps you enjoy finding faster ways to do things and do this especially well. Remember the time you devised a quick solution to a client's last-minute request prior to a trade show or a court appearance?

If there's no overlap between the accomplishments on your resume and your greatest and most enjoyed skills, then you're building a case for a job you don't want. Things you do well, but hate doing, don't belong in your resume.

Expertise-Based Accomplishments

This approach uses important categories of expertise for your target job to generate accomplishments. Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective employer looking to hire someone for your target job. In what areas would he or she reasonably expect to see accomplishments? These might be:

- Functional—for example, a chief operating officer might have experience in MIS, accounting, and facilities; an intellectual property lawyer might have expertise in trademark, patents, and copyrights.
- Experience with a kind of situation or project—such as layoffs, M&A, jury trial, high growth, IPO, or managing people.
- General expertise useful for virtually any position—such as cost-cutting or customer/client service.

Use the areas of expertise for the job you want as a template of what an employer needs. As you write your accomplishment list, check to see where there's under- or overcoverage according to the template. Do you have three cost-cutting accomplishments, four information technology accomplishments, and no people or project management accomplishments? Use the template to identify gaps and generate new accomplishments to fill them, to make needed changes in emphasis, or to eliminate redundancies. This approach is the least familiar but potentially the most important, so don't overlook it.