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## **Resumes: What's Changed, What's Remained the Same**

*A well-crafted resume may not assure you of a job interview, but a poorly prepared one will almost certainly doom your new job prospects.*

With the coming of a new year, many professionals begin considering the possibility of a job change. If you fall into this group, one of the first steps you've probably considered is updating your resume. Because this critically important document remains your most effective tool for landing an interview, and ultimately, a new job, it pays to get your resume right. But what works in today's job market?

Many of the guidelines for resumes have remained consistent over the years and continue to be pertinent; other trends are gaining acceptance to the degree that they are worthy of consideration. A case in point: A recent survey by our company suggests that the "keep-your-resume-to-one-page" rule may be on its way out. The poll included responses from 150 senior executives from the nation's 1,000 largest companies, including representatives from human resources departments.

While more than half (52 percent) of respondents said a single page is the ideal length for a staff-level resume, 44 percent preferred two pages, according to the survey. That compares to 25 percent polled a decade earlier who cited two pages as the optimal resume length; 73 percent of respondents preferred a single page at that time. Moreover, respondents also seemed more receptive to three-page resumes for executive roles, with nearly one-third (31 percent) citing this as the ideal length, compared to only 7 percent a decade ago.

Executives' growing acceptance of longer resumes suggests that, although conciseness is always valued, hiring managers also want to receive enough information to make good assessments of candidates' qualifications.

It may be part of today's conventional wisdom that employers are more receptive to longer resumes, but job seekers should be careful not to go overboard. It's still essential to organize information well and convey it with brevity and precision. With this guiding principle in mind, here are some additional do's and don'ts that remain worth noting:

***Let your experience determine length.*** Although two- and even three-page resumes may be more acceptable, document length should ultimately be determined by the depth of your experience. If your career spans 20 years of positions with increasing responsibility, don't be so concerned about brevity that you gloss over your credentials. On the other hand, don't make your resume longer than necessary to appear more experienced. Also, there's no need to give equal billing to each chapter of your work history; instead, emphasize your most recent and relevant experiences and skills.

***Use terms from the job description.*** Since many resumes are first scanned by computer programs, you can help yours rise to the top by incorporating key words from the job description, assuming these terms accurately describe your skills and experiences. For example, if the job advertisement seeks a legal administrator who is experienced in billing and collections and payroll, consider changing your wording from “experienced in all aspects of accounting and financial management” to specific mentions of these areas.

***Make the document visually appealing.*** Even if the content of your resume is highly impressive, you might eliminate yourself from consideration if the document is not well organized and formatted. Visual appeal still matters. Avoid cramming too much type on a page, using long blocks of text or overly small type. Also, be equally conscious of how your document looks in electronic format as well as in printed form. A document with complicated formatting may not translate well in the electronic environment.

***Don't include irrelevant details about your personal life or hobbies.*** Although you may have an interesting hobby or interest that consumes much of your free time or a recent nonwork achievement you're particularly proud of, such as completing your first half-marathon, prospective employers don't need to learn this from your resume. Keep the focus squarely on your professional accomplishments since this is what the hiring manager is most interested in assessing at this stage. Do mention, however, your involvement in professional associations, such as the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA).

***Don't use complete sentences.*** Short bulleted statements describing your key accomplishments are preferable to complete sentences. Not only do they make it easier for a hiring manager to scan your resume, but they allow information to be conveyed more clearly and concisely.

***Don't use an unprofessional email address.*** If necessary, set up a new personal e-mail box that uses your real name, rather than listing an existing account if the address is something like [catlover@xyz.com](mailto:catlover@xyz.com). And, of course, don't give prospective employers your e-mail address at your current job.

***Don't rely only on yourself to review your resume.*** Even if you've spent countless hours analyzing, spell checking and fine-tuning your resume, don't send it off without having at least one other person review it, preferably someone with a sharp eye for illogical phrasing, typos or misspellings. When you have to act as both writer and editor, it's easy to overlook flaws that may be obvious to others. Therefore, ask a trusted colleague, recruiter or someone who specializes in resume preparation to proofread the document and critique its content and format.

As you update your resume, keep in mind that it is not just a summary of your skills and experience, but the tangible equivalent of a first impression. A well-crafted resume may not assure you of a job interview, but a poorly prepared one will almost certainly doom your new job prospects. Therefore, make the time and effort to ensure your resume is the

best possible extension of yourself and that it strikes the right balance between generally accepted resume rules and emerging trends.

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