



WARMING UP YOUR RESUME

*Seven Tips for Creating a Resume That Makes
Recruiters Want to Meet You*

Joe Mayne

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By Joe Mayne

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INTRODUCTION

What kind of connection does your resume make with recruiters? While most students I talk to have never considered that question, I can tell you from experience that it's incredibly important. Through my work as a recruiter, the college presentations I give, and the High Impact Resume Evaluations (HIRE) I offer to attendees, I've seen more than ten thousand resumes. If there's one thing I've learned from them, it's that in today's tough job market, graduates need more than just a collection of dates and achievements – they need something to help them stand head and shoulders above the millions of other job seekers out there.

It's no surprise to me, then, that so many of them ask for advice on what they can do to make their resumes stand out. Often, however, they're surprised at my answer. The key to a winning resume, I tell them, isn't in having the right GPA or organizations listed; it's in producing something that shows off your background while striking an emotional connection with the recruiter.

One common theme in all of my presentations and written material, one idea that I truly want every new graduate to understand, is that people hire people. It's only natural to want to have the right degree or qualifications, to come from the right background, and to display all of the right skills. But at the end of the day, recruiters aren't looking for a man or woman in their early twenties with a degree in marketing. They might say that's what they're looking for, because it's the best way they can think of to express it, but what they really want is the best person for the job.

The first step toward convincing them that you're that person is having a resume that evokes an emotional response that connects you with the recruiter in a memorable way. You want to create something that gets you noticed and invites the reader to find out more. Over the next few pages, I'm going to show you how to frame your background and experience in a way that does just that. Follow the simple advice you find, and you're going to build a resume that gets you the interview.

UNDERSTAND THE **KEY QUESTION**

Ask most students what they want out of their resume, and their answer will be simple: a job. This seems like a sensible idea, but it's missing a step. That's because resumes don't get you jobs, they get you interviews. Nothing you can put on them will do anything more than motivate the interviewer to decide they'd like to find out more.

With that in mind, the first step to creating a resume that connects with recruiters isn't to stack it full of facts – it's to create interest. Think about things from the other person's perspective. Suppose you had a position to fill with your company. Are you going to hire the applicant with the best GPA, or the one who went to the most prestigious school? Maybe, but only if they turn out to be the best fit for your team and company.

Like every other recruiter, years of experience have taught me that the person with the best numbers and the person who is the best fit aren't always the same person. And so, when I pick up a resume, I'm not deciding who

I'm going to hire. Instead, what I'm thinking of is the key question that comes to mind with any resume: *Do I want to spend 45 minutes to an hour getting to know this person face to face?*

Your resume should reflect that. It's never going to tell a recruiter everything they want to know about you as a person and potential employee, but it can make them want to meet you and ask more questions. Try to imagine it as a one-on-one conversation. Rather than thinking about all of the people out there who could or might give you a job, imagine you're writing to a single reader who wants to find out more about you and your background.

To make things easier, you might want to have several different versions of your resume. Obviously, you'll want to do this anyway if you're going to be seeking different kinds of jobs, or sending it to companies in different industries. But even if you aren't, you might consider customizing it based on what you know about a specific recruiter or interviewer. With the wealth of information available online, or just by calling a mutual acquaintance, you can often get a feel for what a specific person will be looking for.

That might sound like a lot of work, but it can pay off in a really big way. A particularly well-written resume

can create a positive impression in the interviewer's mind, allowing you to begin the interview with a leg up on the other candidates. After all, if you come across like a really interesting or positive person, recruiters are going to want to meet you. And if they're looking forward to having you come in, then you've already made a connection and gotten yourself that much closer to being hired.

MAKE YOUR **OBJECTIVE** STAND OUT

One of the first things any recruiter notices on a resume is the objective, and with good reason. For all of the things I want to know about any candidate, I'm especially curious about what they want from me. The objective is their chance to describe exactly what they're looking for, and why. If they get it right, I have the immediate sense that we're on the same wavelength. If they get it wrong, then I'm forced to wonder why they've decided to apply to my company, and what they're bringing to the table.

If you're going to nail the objective, there are only two things you have to keep in mind. First, you'll have to stand out a bit. Lots of new graduates, eager to show off their enthusiasm and business acumen, try to write

statements that will appeal to everyone. For example, they put down that they're "seeking a position with a fast-paced company that will take advantage of their hard working, high energy personality." Wow. That's a pretty amazing coincidence, given that I've met thousands of other job hunters looking for that exact same thing. Since you want to stand out, not blend in, stay away from the stock objective statements.

The second thing you'll need to do is provide a sense of where you want to go. Give the recruiter a feel for what kind of direction you're taking, and be specific. It's rare to come across a young person who has a good grip on where they want their first job to take them, much less express it in words. Show them that you can – and that you're pursuing the job for more than just a paycheck – and you'll be sure to impress.

Of course, what exact words you should use in your objective statement depend a great deal on your background and, well, your objectives. But to give you a feel for what I mean, consider a resume I saw not too long ago. On the objective line, the young woman had written the following: "I'm looking for a company that will value and benefit from my diverse background and strong interest in languages, overseas travel, and international business." Is that something that everyone could or should put on their resume? No. But did it give

me an immediate and clear picture of where she wanted her career to go? Absolutely.

Strive for that same level of clarity in your own objectives. Again, having different versions of your resume can make things easier by giving you the flexibility to tailor your statement to each employer. But regardless of whether you personalize them or not, remember the two rules: try to stand out, and be as specific as possible about who you are and what you want.

BE A **TRUE PROFESSIONAL**

It would be hard to overstate the importance of the professional memberships and activities that new graduates have listed on their resumes. For one thing, they prove that you've been involved. You'd be amazed at how many people go through their years in higher education and don't show up for anything more than their classes. There are sometimes good reasons for this; family needs or financial commitments often prevent students from doing all that interests them. But usually, a complete lack of activities is a clue that the graduate just wasn't that interested.

Another benefit of industry and club memberships, whether they're on or off campus, is that they put you into situations that are both professional and social. They tell prospective employers that you know how to handle yourself around other working people, which is a major benefit when they consider adding you to their team. One of a recruiter's biggest fears is that they will recommend – or worse yet, actually hire – someone who doesn't know how to act appropriately. Such individuals

aren't just a waste of time and training; they can be difficult to get rid of later.

So, by all means, be sure your resume lists the professional affiliations you have. And don't limit yourself to those groups where you had a lofty title, either. Lots of students fail to mention work they've done because they were "only" an intern or associate member. It's a fact of life that not everyone can be the president of every group, and employers know this. What's more, they also realize that most of the actual work is done by the people who don't chair the meetings. By mentioning that you showed up to help, even though you weren't in charge, you demonstrate that you're a team player – exactly what most companies are looking for.

In the same way, don't forget memberships or activities that go back farther than your most recent college years. Experience from your days as a freshman, or even as a high school student, can count towards your profile. In some ways, it can be even more valuable, since it shows you took an interest or initiative at an early age.

Professional experience, even in a student position, can give you a great edge over other job seekers. Think back to all of the business-related clubs and activities you've been involved in and be sure they're represented on your resume. If nothing comes to mind, then help

yourself in a big way: go out and start getting involved today. Not only will you look more well-rounded to recruiters, but you might just meet someone in your industry who's looking to hire.

KNOW THE **RISKS**

Sometimes, the most strategic piece of your resume is the item that isn't there. That's because, as I hope I've convinced you, the emotional reaction that a recruiter gets from what you've listed about yourself decides what happens next. But recruiters are people, just like you and me, with biases and preferences. Any personal information you include stands a good chance of adding a positive or negative tint to their impression.

Am I saying that the people who look at your resume are prejudiced? No, I'm not. But I am saying that some things are better kept to yourself, or at least saved for the interview. Any recruiter will tell you that they don't screen resumes for or against any race, age, gender, religion, or so on. To do so wouldn't just be illegal; it would also be bad business. Every company needs different kinds of people and personalities to thrive, and even if they didn't, finding the right person is a bottom line issue, and no one wants to lose money.

That being said, might a hiring manager be subconsciously affected by your listed political affiliation, or by seeing what church you belong to? They might. Employers love to know that you're involved with things, so I advise every new graduate to list their activities – but in a way that stresses your participation, not the cause. For instance, volunteer work for a Democratic candidate's campaign or membership in the Young Republicans Club becomes "grassroots political work." The recruiter gets to see that you pitched in, and you get to decide how much to say about it in your interview.

Along those same lines, be selective about what you do reveal in an interview. Since this short title is about resumes, I'm not going to dwell on this point, other than to say that there are many things an interviewer can't legally ask you, like your age or whether or not you have any children, for example. Does that mean you shouldn't mention your kids? Not necessarily. But admitting that you're a parent, and perhaps even a single parent, could create the impression that you don't have as much time to focus on your career as someone else. On the other hand, it could paint you as a hard worker who wants to get ahead for his or her family. The point isn't to withhold it or not, but to go into the interview with a specific plan.

Deciding how much to reveal on your resume, or in a subsequent interview, is a bit of a gray area. How

much you want to say about yourself, and how specific to be, are entirely up to you. There's nothing wrong with putting your views, interests, and affiliations on paper for all the world to see – but remember that there are risks that come with doing so.

HIGHLIGHT YOUR **PERSONALITY**

So far, we've stuck to some of your resume basics: who you are, what you've done, what you want to do, and what to keep to yourself. At this point, though, it's worth mentioning that there is a lot of little ways that you can make your personality come through, while increasing your odds of making a personal connection with the recruiter at the same time.

The simplest way is by showing off some of your personal skills, causes, or achievements. As important as I believe professional associations to be, few things say as much about a candidate as their community involvement and volunteer work. If they've gone out of their way to help someone, without pay or networking opportunities, then two things become clear: they're compassionate and they identify with a cause bigger than themselves. It goes without saying that these are wonderful traits in a prospective employee.

Hobbies and interests can sometimes yield revealing insights, too. A person who collects coins might do so

because they enjoy the attention to detail, or because they like history. Someone who likes travel might be social, or simply enjoy trying new things. Whether you're a movie buff or a recreational athlete, there's something that a recruiter can learn from that. So as long your interest puts you in a positive light, make sure it's listed on your resume.

But where do you draw the line? What if you aren't sure whether your hobby should be listed? To me, the answer lies in being well-rounded. Every once in a while I come across a resume that lists something like success in an online video game world. As a recruiter, I have nothing against those games. In fact, I think they can be fun and mentally engaging. It might suggest to me that you like technology, that you crave new challenges, or that you're a team player. On the other hand, if you haven't accomplished anything else, then I'm left with the obvious question: what else have you done with your time other than play video games?

In short, you want to be sure that your resume lists anything that you think a recruiter can reasonably use to form a more positive and emotionally engaging picture of you. I've seen young men and women list that they've paid for their own educations. Is it something you'd see on everyone's resume? No, but does it make me think

they might be hard-working, motivated individuals? It sure does.

The personal parts of your resume – the awards, notes, and interests that round out a prospective employer’s picture of you as a person – should draw out an emotional response, just as everything else on it should. By giving recruiters a reason to like you and be curious about you, you’re not just winning an interview... you’re warming up the job searching process.

ABOUT THE **AUTHOR**

Joe Mayne is a professional speaker and author from Minneapolis, Minnesota. For more than 15 years, he's been teaching college students from hundreds of campuses across North America how to stand out in the job search process.

From the beginning of his career, when he was hired by a Fortune 500 firm before he graduated college, Joe has been intrigued by the dynamics of the job hunting process. Later, in his work as a recruiter, manager, and consultant, he conducted thousands of interviews and learned how to evaluate candidates from an employer's perspective. He continues to gather and share those insights today through his books, articles, and keynote speeches.

Joe's articles and e-books have been featured nationally online and in the print media, and he continues to give dozens of presentations to colleges and universities each year.

You can find out more about him and his work at www.MayneSpeaker.com

