

Are you a Generic or Brand Name?

What do you think: faced with a choice, will an employer choose to hire a generalist or an expert? Interesting question, and I know that people are confused by which strategy is better, and which one works. I know because I see hundreds of resumes in my business and at job fairs, and most are very general. Let's analyze the choices.

A generalist, in terms of our resume question, is one who claims to want a job that "uses my skills and provides room for growth." This person figures that someone who will do all jobs is attractive to an employer. This is flawed thinking. Every position, from custodian to receptionist to sales person to accountant and on, has a particular set of skills, training or higher education, and character or personal attributes that are necessary to do the job well. And the person who demonstrates that he or she has what it takes to get the job done is much more likely to do a good job from the get-go than one who has demonstrated no background in this area.

Need a bit more convincing? You've applied with a general resume that lists your work history, listing position responsibilities and accountabilities. Two hundred others have also applied. Out of these, quite a number are like you: no focus, no strategy, just a general resume that is sent to hundreds of companies.

Several, though, stand out. These are focused on the position at hand, and from beginning to end attempt to describe that person as a "perfect fit." An H.R. consultant shared with me recently, "When faced with 200 resumes to sift through, I give myself two hours to whittle them down to 10 to 20 that look promising. Oftentimes I go on looks alone, and those skimpy bare-boned resumes, the ones where you don't know what position they think they are interested in, these don't even get five seconds of my time!" I hope you are convinced. If not, continue clicking "attach" and "send," and settle in for an extremely long job hunt!

Let's turn our attention to why the "expert's" resume is effective. The written word has power, and our experts from above understand how to ensure that the words on their resumes exert a powerful and positive impact on the reader.

How does one do this? With focus. Demonstrate how you have the precise set of skills, related education and undeniable proof of accomplishments in the field to which you are applying. Carry this through from the first word to the last, and get ready to field the calls for interviews and job offers! Here's how to do it.

- ▶ According to recruiters, they are such busy people that they would appreciate knowing, right on the resume, the title of the position applied for. Show your respect for the recruiter's time, and add your goal at the top of the resume, for example, *Customer Service*. You've removed the need for that Objective statement that every person writes in a similar fashion, that bores recruiters and makes them wonder if they live in a society of cloned job hunters!
- ▶ Take your title a step further now. Give yourself a tagline. Think Nike's *Just Do It*, or your favourite restaurant's *Comfort Food Just like Mom's*. Our Customer Service rep could add *Delivers Service with a Smile* or *Thorough and Accurate*. Whatever you coin for yourself, make sure it is authentic to you, and is backed up in your resume.
- ▶ Create a list of skills that are necessary to that job. Our Customer Service rep could list things such as Customer Service Training, Conflict Resolution, Sales Follow-up, Data Entry, Keyboarding of 60 wpm, Proofreading. Each position has hard skills that are needed to complete the job—list yours. You may think that this is obvious, but there are two reasons for this list: one is that the HR recruiters may use a checklist of key words to evaluate your candidacy, and the second is that some companies use scanning software that looks

for keywords to evaluate your candidacy! Make sure your resume is full of key words appropriate to your field.

- ▶ Pen a profile of yourself that can best be described as a further condensation of your resume, which is already a synopsis of your relevant education, skills and experience. Your profile, whether in point form or paragraph, will list number of years' experience in the field, it may include the sectors in which you completed this work, the accomplishment you are most proud of, the skill you are most recognized for, and the personal attribute for which you are well-regarded. Whatever you do write in that profile, make sure you back it up in the body of the resume.
- ▶ Strategize that profile. If you are applying for a position, such as police or firefighter, your profile should address those many qualifications they are looking for. For example, what grade of license you hold (and in good standing of course!), the certificates you hold, reference to your physical condition in a meaningful fashion (conduct daily training for the New York marathon). Get creative, make it interesting, and be authentic.
- ▶ Focus your workplace accomplishments on the attributes and qualifications the position requires. Show how you contributed to a team effort, the role you played, the outcome of the project; show how you came up with improvements on your own, and how you researched and presented your proposal to management. Get specific and provide enough detail to add context to your accomplishments. Use numbers as much as possible. A universal language, numbers also add that all-important context. For example, rather than stating: "Revamped the filing system," state: "Revamped a 2,000 unit filing system. Over two months, researched available systems, developed a report and proposal for management, secured approval with one hour presentation, and received corporate 'Outstanding Corporate Citizen Award.'" Context makes all the difference!

This approach to focusing your resume's content, and branding yourself as an expert is not reserved for executives. Even "Joe the Plumber" can aspire to brand name recognition. He could state: "leak-proof plumbing guaranteed or your money back." An administrative assistant could write: "whose telephone smile builds rapport," and a retail associate in women's fashion could sell her value with "building repeat customers with undeniable fashion flair." Admittedly this is a difficult exercise for most of us as it requires a level of self-knowledge that few seem to have, so you will likely benefit from brainstorming with trusted friends and family.

Focus serves to corroborate your positioning as an expert in your field. Aside from ensuring that your resume will be noticed, there is another side-effect to "branding" yourself: a better offer.

Everyone will pay more for a brand name, whether in clothing, sporting gear or construction tools. The same holds true for employment. Do your career and your pocket book a favor: drop the generic approach and position yourself as an expert—as a brand name.

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