



First Impressions

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I have never been a big fan of resumes. A resume does not always portray a candidate properly. In today's world of immediacy, the resume has become the best (and quickest) screening tool for employers to identify the most qualified candidates to interview for the available job.

Regardless of what industry you are in, your resume is about your future, not your past. A resume should be a marketing piece. An accurate and truthful representation of your work experience. It is important to have a resume that sells your qualifications to the employer. Please note that your qualifications need to match what the company is looking for. In order to do this, you have to read and understand the job description or ad & identify what the requirements/qualifications are.

Many interviewers use 'Behavioral' based questions when interviewing. Understanding how 'Behavioral' interviews work can help in creating a stand-out resume.

Most people have specific experience or training/schooling that will have their job search focused on those experiences. Accountant, Pilot, Engineer, Nurse, Customer Service Representative. Industries may be varied from a sports team, to marketing/PR/advertising, to working for a food processing company. But the job functions will be the same regardless of industry.

Let's use an example of a hypothetical Customer Service advertisement. Let's look at this ad from the perspective of someone conducting a behavioral based interview.

FurstStaffing is recruiting for a Customer Service Representative who will be responsible for written and verbal communication with clients, will be on the phone 98% of the day, will be verifying information, assisting customers with their current cable plan and informing customer about new products, assisting customers who have technical issues or billing issues, and providing information to potential customers who call in, etc.

The 'Behavioral' interviewer is going to look at what skills and characteristics are going to make a candidate successful in this role. This person will need:

Integrity: will be working with confidential information and credit card information.

Customer Service Skills: Working with external customers 98% of the time and internal team as well.

Problem Solving Skills: Must be able to figure out the best solution to our client's problem.

Persuasion: We have new products we need to sell. Candidate must be able to up-sell current customer.

Attitude towards work: if our Customer Service Rep is not happy, you can be sure our client is going to know it the moment they connect on the phone.

Oral Communication: Must be articulate and clear when speaking on the phone.

A 'Behavioral' Interviewer will have questions focusing on obtaining specific examples from work experiences or personal experiences. Let's think about what skills/characteristics are going to be required in every Customer Service position. Oral Communication is an easy one for the interviewer to figure out. I think every employer would seek someone with Integrity...and because the goal of business is usually to be profitable, we don't want to lose customers and we would love to sell more products, therefore, let's also select Persuasion.

Integrity: What is integrity? Webster says "Adherence to a code of values." Questions that would reveal specific examples of integrity might be:

- We all have times when we feel we were treated unfairly by our employer. Give me an example of a time when this happened to you?
- Have you ever worked in a situation where you knew that no one would check up on your work?

Follow up questions will be:

- What was the situation?
- What did you do?
- What was the result?

Acceptable answers will be honest and straightforward. A less than acceptable answer will provide a sense of entitlement, falsifying information or stealing.

Let's look at Persuasion. Questions to find examples of persuasion might be:

- Give me an example of when you had to convince someone to do something they did not want to do?
- Give me an example of when you had a good idea, but not one would listen.

Follow up questions:

- What was the idea or situation?
- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?

I am not suggesting you answer these types of questions in your resume. What I am trying to explain is each position (Accountant, Pilot, Engineer, CSR) has skills or characteristics that will always be required of the position regardless of industry. Having these skills/traits/characteristics are a must to be successful in this position. Find out what those characteristics are for the position you seek. Then phrase your resume to emphasize those skills or characteristics. It takes a little work upfront to recognize these common skills and characteristics but I think it will help your resume stand out when it goes across the recruiters screen or desk.

Here are some examples of taking this "Behavioral" approach to your resume to emphasize these important skills:

Negotiation:

Purchased all direct and indirect materials from both domestic and overseas sources for three divisions located in two buildings by competitive pricing.

OR

Negotiated pricing to assure lowest price, fastest shipping time and highest quality materials while working with multiple vendors domestically and internationally for three divisions of the company.

Customer Service:

Provided quality customer service to existing and potential customers.

OR

Developed relationships with assigned accounts and provided customer service related to billing inquiries, product questions, delivery status, suggesting products to clients and potential clients.

Persuasion/Selling:

Cross-sold cable products.

OR

Listened to client concerns and/or interests, offered product suggestions based on need and converted suggestions into sales.

Flexibility & Initiative:

Managed and assisted in the development and implementation of recruitment programs.

OR

Maintained flexibility to adapt strategies, make decisions and change recruitment plans to meet shifting priorities and customer needs within dynamic market conditions.

Initiative & Performance:

Responsible for executing program delivery including meeting budgetary and schedule goals.

OR

Increased on-time and on-budget program delivery from 10% to over 50% with the initial roll out and deployment of product.

The first statements are not bad statements. They are what we typically see in a resume and they are acceptable. Our goal however, is to make your resume stand out as the hiring manager skims through your work experiences. The second statements go a bit further and development that skill or characteristic a little more. In the last example, Initiative & Performance, if you can show a result in numbers or percentages, do so.

Also, keep in mind with technology employers can verify your information. Do not falsify anything on your resume. It has to be the real deal.

Don't forget to proofread your resume and ask a friend to review it as well.

This might be a bit backwards, but I want to touch briefly on the "Cover Letter". The cover letter is my least favorite part of a resume to write. Don't want to sound desperate, don't want to sound like a 'know-it-all' or a fake. I have a couple of examples of cover letters received from the same advertisement.

Example #1:

Please accept my resume for consideration on the position with your company that I am applying for. I believe that I have the knowledge and experiences that would make me become an asset to your organization in the position. I look forward to hearing from you so that I can discuss this position in further detail. Thank you.

Any thoughts on this example? It is too generalized. I may have 10 positions available within my company, there is nothing in this specifying what this person does for a living or what job they are responding to. Most people sound alike in their cover letters and resumes. The goal is to make the HR rep/recruiter remember what you said....in a positive way. Why does the employer need you....keep those specific skills and characteristics in mind.

Example #2:

Dear Sir or Madam:

As a buyer, I appreciated the value of seasoned customer service representatives who knew me, my company and my product applications.

In different capacities throughout my career, I have worked with customers to meet their product needs. As a staff manufacturing engineer in the computer monitor division at ABC Co, I visited and coordinated start-ups of monitors for DEF Co., GHI Co., JKL Co., and others. At MNO Co., I visited and interacted with PQR Co. management to establish focused factories to allow them to shift production between their different facilities, and I took over production of transformers for STU Co. when it was dissatisfied with our performance. As plant manager at VQX Co., I regularly interacted with customers as the product application expert. At Y&Z Co., I mentored customer service representatives to understand the complexity of the different product lines of the three divisions and had to answer direct customer questions on applications.

I have both gathered and developed costs for customer quotes and have a thorough understanding of material, labor, transportation and overhead costs. In addition at each employer, I have identified improper costing of products that put sales at a competitive disadvantage. I have extensive experience creating and maintaining bills of material working with design engineers, production supervision, material personnel and purchasing as well as customers and vendors.

I understand the importance of filling every line to the specified quantity on a customer's order just as our vendors should understand the importance of filling every line to the specified quantities on our purchase orders. If the vendor fails, we fail, and the customer fails. Failure is not an option.

I have worked for large, highly structured corporations and moderately sized, loosely organized companies. In either case, I was uncompromisingly dedicated to the pursuit of the company's and its customers' betterment.

As a customer service representative for your client, I will know the product line, I will know the company, and I will know the customers and their applications. I will succeed.

Sincerely

Ok, there is such a thing as over kill. This example has some good points but I can honestly tell you it was way too much. HR/Recruiters receive large numbers of responses to their job postings. The length of this cover letter makes it unappealing to read and because of a bad cover letter many hiring managers may never see the resume. If you do read this it is entirely about the author...they are SuperPerson. It is a hard sell...a bit pushy. They talk a lot about what "I" did but not so much about the results of the actions, skills, characteristics...but may be that was in the resume. ☺

Example #3:

My goal is for a fresh start with new opportunities. My ideal company will consist of people who care about doing a great job, people whom I can learn from and grown with. I am most interested in the areas of Customer Service and Office and or Accounting Assistance. These are areas in which I am quite familiar with. My most recent position consisted mostly of processing new orders and creating certificates of compliance for our products. I also have a great deal of experience in dealing with customers concerning discrepancies in paperwork and account balances. I

enjoyed my most recent position very much however, was recently laid off due to lack of work. I have no official management experience at this time but have been left in charge of small groups of coworkers on more than one occasion. I am very quick to pick up on procedures and given the chance will make a valuable asset to any organization.

This cover letter shares a little too much. It is good to make the hiring people have a little intrigue. That being said the individual appears to be sincere. Never talk negatively about yourself, your experience or former employer. No need to point out any weaknesses...don't worry the interviewer will ask about these once you get to the interview. There was no conclusion to the cover letter. The statements are not strong and commanding but rather casual comments. There is not much structure or organization to this cover letter. And again, this is not specific to my company...maybe my job but this candidate is going to be a 'valuable asset to any organization'.

Example #4:

Dear Human Resource Manager:

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Customer Service Representative. As you can see by my enclosed resume, I have several years of experience I can bring to your company.

I am a very hard worker and have had many enjoyable years working in the Customer Service/Manufacturing field. My goal at this time is to seek a position within a company in which I can build a lasting career. I am also hoping to work with a company that focuses on teamwork as being a strong component and to provide customers with the services they deserve and expect.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this position. You may contact me at xxx-xx-xxxx any time to schedule an interview. I know I can be a great asset to you not only from my desire to learn more about your company but also by bringing 30 years of experience to you. I am excited at the prospect of being able to join your team of professionals.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Wow, as an employer it sounds like I am going to get something with this employee. What I like about this cover letter is it is stating 1) candidate has experience 2) has integrity and expects her employer too as well 3) knows what they are applying for 4) is open to learning 5) teamwork is important. It was a very well put together cover letter. This candidate touched on 2 items that could be considered skills/characteristics that are found in a CSR role: Integrity and teamwork. I will tell you that I phoned this candidate on a Thursday or Friday. Conducted a phone interview and schedule for them to come in on Monday for a face-to-face interview and testing. I received an email over the weekend from this candidate stating they had received a job offer and had accepted.

As you can tell, we touched mostly on the content of a resume, identifying those specific skills and characteristics that will be found in each CSR role, no matter the industry. And we just briefly touched on the cover letter. There is a lot of information on-line about how to format a resume.

You have all heard and/or experienced the job market. It is challenging right now. People are making compromises on their requirements and expectations in order to secure a job. If you do not like sales, you are going to have to buck up and get selling. Selling your skills, your abilities, selling YOU. Networking is one of the keys to this process of the job search.

Here are some suggestions on where you should be networking:

- Make your friends and family aware of your job search. Be clear.
- Use alumni organizations, classmates, former co-workers, neighbors
- Get on-line use facebook, Linked In, Twitter, etc to generate leads.
- Participate in professional associations and seminars. You never know where that one lead may come from.
- Register with employment agencies/staffing firms. Make sure the company is a reputable firm. Not all staffing firms are equal. Right now, with companies unsure of what their business volume might be they will probably turn to a staffing company to hire employees. It saves them time & money from a recruiting aspect as well as not having to pay payroll tax on the employee. Many assignments become a hire-on opportunity. It gives you experience & provides a resume filler while you are conducting your job search.
- Make sure that you track all of your contacts and the referrals you receive. As you reach out to a referral, make sure you have the permission of the contact to use their name during the introduction.

There is no formula or fill-in-the blank resume. Writing a good resume is not an easy task. It will require some thought and an investment of time on your part. I hope this has provided a slightly different approach to writing a resume and has been helpful.