

Résumé Myths: Fact or Fiction?

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are candidates who hide their career experiences—they assume the worst! List your experiences and describe what you learned from them. While you can summarize older positions, make sure that an employer will understand the sequencing of your career history.

Myth No. 3: Make your résumé stand out by using unusual fonts, colors and images.

Reality: You want your résumé to be easily opened, read and copied. Unusual formatting increases the odds that a recipient will not be able to open or view it properly. Stick to a white background and standard fonts. Vary the font size, use bolding, underlining or italics for emphasis, and consider a mix of bulleted items and text. Do not put periods or odd punctuation in the document name. Avoid document names such as ChuckResumeFundraisingJobs that might indicate that you have multiple career goals.

While it is a common practice outside the United States to include a photograph, most U.S. employers think it is inappropriate and potentially discriminatory.

Do not exceed 200 kilobytes, or you may be “spammed out” or clog your potential employer’s system. If you can, use PDF format. If not, use a standard Word format.

Myth No. 4: Your résumé should be no longer than one page.

Reality: While it is important to be concise and to prioritize the items on your résumé, you should take the pages you need to list your experience and educa-

While those of us in the executive search profession do not run a professional résumé business, we do review hundreds of résumés during the course of our search work. Because we are frequently asked for advice, following are some mistakes that development professionals often make in describing their experience and accomplishments to potential employers.

Myth No. 1: Make your résumé functional by selecting your categories of strength and listing work and volunteer experience that relate to these categories.

Reality: Some experts encourage candidates to prepare functional résumés. However, we have always found them difficult to evaluate and too long and we prefer chronological résumés. Functional résumés make it difficult to develop a full picture of a person’s career, and some employers are suspicious that a functional résumé attempts to hide a spotty work history.

Myth No. 2: Avoid listing positions older than 10 years on your résumé.

Reality: In development, experience is usually a plus. Yes, age discrimination exists, but smart employers do not do it. What smart employers avoid

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tion fully. Describe your more recent experiences in greater detail. List additional training when it is relevant to the position. Selectively include volunteer experience. Keep it under four pages.

Myth No. 5: If your résumé looks good on your printer, it will on everyone else's.

Reality: We see lots of résumés with page breaks in awkward places and/or scattered blank pages. We sometimes see résumés that don't print at all because they are configured for special sized paper or contain an image that overwhelms some printers. Try emailing your résumé to friends with different printers and make sure that it opens and prints properly. Producing your résumé in PDF format can reduce the number of printing issues.

Myth No. 6: List only your home telephone number on your résumé.

Reality: You need to list a number and email address where you can be easily reached. Every number should be one that you answer and check frequently and at which someone has a good chance of reaching you during business hours. Avoid giving numbers that another person might answer (even a partner — when an employer calls, they can't assume your partner knows you are looking for a job!). Your voice message should sound professional, should state your name, and should let people know whether personal and confidential messages can be left. On email, you should use a confidential account that is not managed by your employer and that will not "spam out" potential employer enquiries. Your email address should sound professional—not ready2party@hotmail.com!

Myth No. 7: A few typos on the résumé do not matter.

Reality: A few typos on the résumé may sink your candidacy. Employers will assume that your résumé is representative of your best writing and editing skills. Proofread, spell check, and have your friends read your résumé. Every entry

throughout your résumé should have consistent structure. We suggest bullet items beginning with action verbs such as lead, organize, supervise, create, build and produce.

Myth No. 8: No one wants to see numbers on your résumé.

Reality: In development, everyone wants to see your accomplishments quantified. Use specific numbers in talking about the number of staff managed, prospects in your portfolio, gifts raised, calls, mailings, events, attendees. While some of your results can be shown in percentages, for most, the actual numbers will be most relevant.

Myth No. 9: Everyone will recognize my employer.

Reality: Do not assume that everyone who sees your résumé will know about your current or previous employer. List the organization and its location. Rick King of Kittleman & Associates suggests "a short descriptive sentence about the organizations/institutions to provide context." A hyperlink may be helpful.

Myth No. 10: If I ask that my résumé be treated confidentially, it will be.

Reality: Once you begin a job search and you distribute your résumé, anything can happen. The wider your résumé is circulated, the more likely it is that someone will either inadvertently or deliberately "spill the beans." While you can ask a prospective employer to keep your search confidential, you also want them to discuss your application with other decision makers. It is difficult to control who can and who can-

not see your résumé, so you should be aware that it might become "public" more quickly than you had hoped.

Myth No. 11: Put your references on your résumé.

Reality: Sometimes the person scanning your résumé may see an individual they know or respect listed as your reference. However, the listing of names will lengthen your résumé and may induce reference calls to be made too early in the process to be most helpful to you. Certainly, if you want any degree of confidentiality, a statement that references are available is sufficient. You should contact references in advance of your search and they should be alerted if you believe an employer will contact them.

Myth No. 12: You should prepare a résumé only when you see a position of interest.

Reality: You should always keep your résumé up-to-date. You never know when you might see an opportunity of special interest, and in today's market, you need to be nimble. If you list your accomplishments as they occur, you will be sure to get them onto the résumé so that they are not forgotten in the rush of preparing a new document. You can tailor a résumé for a particular position, but it is more productive (and less error prone) to carefully prepare a cover letter that specifically highlights the match of your experience with the job you are seeking. ©

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 Resources

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