

Top Resume Blunders and How You Can Avoid Them

Compiled by the Diversity, Inc. staff

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Avoiding costly resume blunders is Career Advice 101. So it's truly a wonder that so many smart, capable and experienced job applicants have resumes that work against them. Your resume will either be the bullhorn that demands attention and gets you in the door or the red flag that warns a potential employer you're not ready for primetime. Here are some tips on how to make sure your resume is one that will get you in the door.

To Reveal or Not to Reveal: What to Say About Your Ethnicity or Race

How much do you stand to gain by revealing your ethnicity on a resume? How much do you stand to lose? It's a tough question. Janet Crenshaw Smith, president of the Ivy Planning Group, a management-consulting and training firm, says the idea of revealing that she was a Black woman on her resume is an issue she's gone back and forth on. "I know my parents would want to hide ethnicity as much as you can because you didn't trust that it was going to help you," she says. "But I've gotten to the place where I believe that if you are a person of color and you belong to organizations that are focused on your ethnicity, you should definitely put that on your resume. Why would you want to get a job at a place that doesn't value your difference?"

Reniece Wright, director of human resources at the National Black MBA Association, agrees. "It's an integrity issue. It's a values issue. Being out there in the HR field, I deal with this daily. Do you hide who you are? I don't think it's anything to shy away from because your experience and skills should sell themselves," she says. "If you're a member of special organizations, you should be proud enough to put them on your resume. I always encourage people to be who they are on their resume."

Smith says when she first started her company many years ago, she was hesitant to put any personnel photos up on her web site for fear of scaring away potential business. "But we realized that corporate America has really evolved, and we have to as well," she says.

Don't Exaggerate - and Never Lie

Yes, it will be tempting to overstate your responsibilities at your previous positions. What could it hurt to fluff out your duties just a little bit? Not much - unless you get caught.

"In today's world, employers, because of ethics laws and corporate-responsibility guidelines, are [going deeper into their background checks](#)," Berlinda Fontenot-Jamerson, former Director of Diversity and Human Resources for Disney-owned ABC, told DiversityInc. "Today they're drilling down and checking everyone, especially if you're going to have control of finances or if you'll be in the public eye."

Highlight Your Accomplishments, Not Your Job Description

"Your resume must be accomplishment driven versus duties driven," says Wright. "Talk about those high impact accomplishments that job seekers are looking for. An accomplishment oriented resume is what sells you."

Smith adds, "You have to demonstrate [that] you made an impact to the bottom line. So rather than just listing the job, you have to describe your impact in a way that [shows] you understand the business you were in. Even if you haven't risen to the point of being a high-level manager ... you're still making an impact."

Get Rid of That Blog ... Get Rid of it Now

It may feel great to wax poetic on your own personal blog about everything from your latest dating conquest to how much you despised your old boss, but that could come back to haunt you in a big way, warns Nancy Flynn, Executive Director of the ePolicy Institute, based in Columbus, Ohio. The institute is dedicated to educating employers and prospective employees about e-mail, Internet and software policies.

"Twelve percent of employers are monitoring the blogosphere to see what's being written about their company, and 10 percent are monitoring social-networking sites," says Flynn. "So for younger applicants ... if you operate a blog or have a social-networking page, don't list those on your resume unless they're focused on your career. A growing number of employers are going online to find your blog because that's what will really reveal the real you."

Don't Forget to Attach a Cover Letter

Even if you're sending your resume out electronically, you still need a cover e-mail. And don't take the boilerplate approach. Each cover letter should be customized to fit the position that you're applying for, detailing the experiences that make you relevant for that particular position. "You want to focus on your first three sentences [in case] your recipient is using a reading pane that allows the recipient to read the first three sentences and then decide whether to read and act on the message or just ignore it and delete it," says Flynn. "Those first three sentences are all important."

Are You Sure About That Reference?

List references at your own peril. If you're going to list references, make sure you have their permission and that those references know something about the job you are seeking. You should also have a good idea what your references are likely to say. "There's nothing worse than to list someone as a reference and have them say bad things about you," says Flynn.

Enough With the Juvenile E-mail Address

When Stacy Havel, Director of Public Relations for Bernard Hodes Group, a recruitment company, came across an e-mail application from "sexy daddy," she laughed and passed the e-mail around the office for others to see. What she didn't do was respond or bring the applicant in for an interview.

"When you see someone identifying themselves in a vulgar or inappropriate way, it gives insight to their personality," Havel says, referring to "sexy daddy" and the [hundreds of other resumes](#) she's received from job seekers.

When It Comes to Resumes, Looks Are Important

A resume should be appealing and easy to read. Poor formatting kills your prospects before you've even begun. Make appropriate use of white space and bullet your information. Make it easy for the prospective employer to contact you. Use a standard typeface and font size. "You

want your resume to stand out, but you don't want it to look unprofessional and gimmicky," says Flynn.

If you have extensive experience, don't be afraid to have a two-page resume. Cramming everything on one page or eliminating relevant experience could end up hurting your chances. But if you are just starting out and your resume is four pages long, then it's time to do some editing. Knowing how to use the copy machine is not a job skill that needs highlighting on your resume.

Don't Live By Spell-Check Alone

Yes, spell-check is essential anytime you send out anything to a prospective employer, but relying on the computer alone is not enough. Spell-check will only catch words that are misspelled, not words that are used out of context or used inappropriately. You have to re-read literally every line of your resume yourself before you should feel comfortable sending it out. And for insurance, have a friend give it one last look over before you send it out.

"[Grammar is with us at every level](#)," Maryann V. Piotrowski, author of *Effective Business Writing*, told DiversityInc. "It can hurt you if the reader recognizes [your poor grammar or spelling] and cares about good expression."

Return to Sender?

"Make sure you have the correct e-mail address," says Flynn. Unless the job posting specifically says "No Phone Calls," call the company to verify you're sending your resume to the correct address. "Because of the sheer volume of electronic resumes received, I would follow up with a phone call to ensure it's been received and see if you can schedule an appointment," says Flynn.